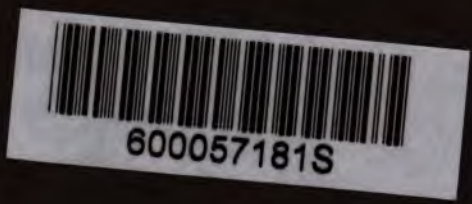

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IN A WORLD

OF

HIS OWN.

BY

MRS. FRED. E. PIRKIS,

AUTHOR OF

"DISAPPEARED FROM HER HOME."

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IN A WORLD OF HIS OWN.

BOOK III.—Continued.

CHAPTER XV.

THE year rolled on; the destiny of France no longer quivers in the balance, an Emperor is sent into sorrow and exile, a throne stands vacant at the head of a great nation, and Europe resounds with the Io Pæans of the victorious Prussians.

Llewellyn March, no longer a prisoner of war, still lingers amongst the honest, kindly

German folk; lingers with the hope that he will sooner or later have tidings of the friend who stretched forth his right hand to help and succour him in the time of his need.

For Elliott's fate was still wrapped in mystery.

Llewellyn had spared no pains, had exhausted every possible and impossible channel of enquiry, had followed up every clue, or pretence of one, questioning the highest and lowest of the prisoners of war with whom his lot was cast, and above all Elliott's own men, among whom he was fortunate enough to discover the trooper who had assisted Elliott in carrying him from the field of battle to the lonely farm-house, on the night of Gravelotte.

This man's testimony was very clear; he spoke of meeting Elliott coming from the

farm-house as he was returning thither with the ambulance doctor, and that Elliott, after exchanging a few words with him, took once more the road leading to Gravelotte, instead of turning towards the camp and fortress. Beyond this nothing could be ascertained; the Prussian burying parties had cleared the field on the day following the battle, and from their officers Llewellyn could learn nothing. To his own mind it was quite evident that some unforeseen calamity had overtaken his friend, but what, of course, he was utterly at a loss to imagine.

His search took him in places and among people he would not, under other circumstances, have visited, receiving on all sides from this simple German people the warmest welcome and most cordial hospitality.

But the fate of his friend he never knew.

Once, many years after this, he was staying at some noble lord's shooting-box in Hampshire, and went tramping through the limp withes and reeds one hot hazy October morniug, with an ancient gamekeeper by his side. So ancient indeed was this gamekeeper, that he could remember the planting of the beech avenue on one side of the house, and the marriage of the said noble lord's father about fifty years previously. Some remark that he made concerning this marriage, and an elder brother of the present earl who had been disinherited ("driven from his home," he had phrased it) attracted Llewellyn's attention, and putting one or two questions to the old man, he drew forth the same story he had heard once before under the shadow of the

fortress at Metz. Then Llewellyn knew that the beautiful lady he had so much admired on the previous night, and who played her part of hostess so gracefully, was Elliott's first love, and that that stately, courteous, middle-aged nobleman, with the handsome sons and slender daughters growing up around him, was his fair-haired false-hearted brother!

But this was many years after.

It was long before Llewellyn could make up his mind that his quest was altogether a vain one; ever and again a gleam of hope would shine out and lure him on once more to recommence a search which his better judgment told him could only end in disappointment. This man, with his bitter prejudices and great wrongs, had taken strong hold on Llewellyn's sympathies and imagina-

tion, and true in friendship as he was in love, he felt he should carry the recollection of this strong brave, if somewhat warped nature to his very grave.

It would have been difficult at this time for Llewellyn March to have given a correct or minute transcript of his own state of mind and feelings, even had he been inclined to make the attempt. This, however, he was not disposed to do, he had no sympathy whatever with the "wayward modern mind, dissecting passion," his intellect was too straightforward and simple to care to lose itself in the winding paths of morbid self-analysis.

"As well might a man," he had once said, when discussing this question with Max, "pull apart the petals of a rose and

seek to discover wherein the scent lies, as divide his soul into sections, and think to find out the exact proportion of passion and purpose in each."

Llewellyn March had inherited as his birthright the genuine Celtic nature, emotional, impassioned, with its intense love for the beautiful, and its high poetic susceptibilities. His early training and education had fostered and developed this nature, and a long course of sunny days had further contributed towards its perfection; joined however to this Celtic temperament, and blended with it, was a clearness of intellect, a quick discernment and simple straightforwardness, which prevented the emotional faculties from betraying him into sentimentality, and led him at times to go straight to the very root of a matter, while

other men, more logical perhaps, with weightier brains, were plodding and digging upon the surface.

Steady, patient Saxon Max had in due course detected these peculiarities in his friend's temperament, and had not hesitated to speak of them.

"Here," he had said, "am I for ever wheeling round and round about my subject like an old hawk over its prey; it's true with each gyration I get lower and nearer to the point I wish to seize upon, but you without any wheeling or gyrations dart straight at your point like a swift or a swallow."

"But do I make as good use of it when I have seized it?" was Llewellyn's laughing rejoinder. "Am I not rather too ready at times to let it go for other brighter and more

varied matter?" and Max, pushed into a corner, was compelled to admit that such oftentimes was the case.

But however true this might be with regard to matters of art, of science, or of literature, in his friendship and love no Saxon could be more true and steadfast than Llewellyn March. His boyish fondness for Max had developed into the strongest friendship one man could have for another, and his love for Victoria, shaken, as it well might have been, to its very roots, was in no sense a memory or thing of the past.

For in truth the girl he had loved and worshipped had as much real existence now as she had ever had!

With idealizing eyes he had seen her, with idealizing heart he had loved her, and the

ideal woman his fancy had created, stood in front of the real living Victoria, and altogether shut her out of his sight. For a moment only this ideal Victoria had stepped on one side, and left the real woman standing face to face with him with no outward blandishments or adornments, and the shock of the reality had almost overturned his reason; but it was for one moment only, the ideal goddess had speedily been replaced on her pedestal, the real woman in the shadow behind followed out her own fancies, and lived on the common bread and wine of the rest of mankind, and Llewellyn March, in his ideal world, could have found no place for her.

"Poor child," he would think, "hers is a deep true nature, warped and stunted by the stifling atmosphere of conventionalities

in which she has been reared, yet warped and stunted as it is, is far more glorious than that of lesser souls in the fulness of their blossom and beauty. Her light will shine out clear and strong some day. God grant her strength to bear the bitterness of the repentance that will come upon her!"

So he went on weaving visions and fancies in which Victoria stood out as the central figure, decked in the rainbow hues of his own imagination, the embodiment of all that was fair and sweet and beautiful in woman. Scarcely indeed a woman at all, but some ideal goddess, who, although she had for one moment stepped down from her throne to perform some essentially human deed utterly unworthy of her divinity, yet would repent so truly and unfeignedly of her fault that—

although the consequences towards himself might never be undone—this her sorrow would shine out as one of the brightest jewels in her crown when she once more re-ascended to her natural sphere.

With Anna, however, it was far otherwise. There was no glamour of love to mystify his senses, and hold a veil before his eyes whenever he sought to look upon her sweet face. Just as she was in her fresh simple girlishness he could see and admire her. No angel nor goddess, indeed, to be looked upon from afar and worshipped, but a living, breathing, loving woman whom he reverenced as every man should reverence a true-hearted woman, reverenced as his own sister, or as the wife of his dearest friend, for in this light he had latterly endeavoured to look upon her.

Her freshness, her sweetness, even her impetuosity and wilfulness, joined as it was to her strong sympathy for and with himself, could not but form a very pleasant and attractive picture to him, in spite of the deep pain which he had felt on the discovery of the real state of her feelings towards him. He tried to comfort himself with the thought—"It is only a girl's fancy, she will very quickly get over it and learn to appreciate good honest Max and his unselfish love;" and meantime, in his exile and loneliness, it was very sweet to him to think over her unbounded generosity and kindliness towards himself, very sweet too to know that his old dearly-loved home would be owned and ruled over by one so truly worthy, and who could appreciate so fully its natural and artistic beauties.

Following in the wake of such thoughts as these, or rather mingled with them, came others more gloomy and bitter. Feelings of scorn and anger towards himself, deepest scorn, bitterest anger, for the weakness and want of courage he had shown in the time of trial.

"Weighed in the balance and found wanting," he was for ever repeating to himself, "knocked over by the first blow of bad fortune; I, so conscious of my own powers and gifts, I who imagined in my blind folly and self-conceit, that I stood on a higher platform than my fellow men, and could start for fame and success in life from a better vantage ground than they!"

But the worst part of all was the difficulty,

the almost impossibility of retracing his steps, of returning with dignity to his former position and pursuits, of taking up once more the thread of his life which he had so readily let fall from his hands.

"I bent to circumstances, and now they are ruling my life," was his thought. "I let go the helm, and now my ship must bear the brunt of wind and wave, and be buffeted hither and thither at their will."

Once, seized with a sudden fit of impatience and longing, he determined to start for his own home and friends once more, and endeavour to take up his old pursuits and art studies. Then the thought of Anna confronted him, and he felt how much better and wiser it was that he should remain thus separated

from his friends, for the present, at least. At another time he thought he would adopt some pursuit, medicine, perhaps, sculpture or painting, possibly, as a profession, and devote himself body and soul to it. Then the thought of Elliott, and some faint hope of a chance light being thrown on his fate, would spring up, and distract, and unsettle his mind.

So he lingered on through the spring and early summer, wandering hither and thither in the Franco-Prussian border-land, impatient often, irritable at times, with jarring nerves, and that feeling of self-contempt and self-scorn which a strong, true nature ever experiences when, having set before itself a high standard, it realises to the full how far short it has fallen of it, when, having marked

out for itself a goal, a distant point to be reached, it suddenly discovers it has taken a road leading in an exactly opposite direction.

CHAPTER XVI.

MEANTIME, some important changes were taking place in Sir Charles Oldfield's household. Towards the end of the summer, Sir Charles's son and heir was born, and a few weeks later on the Baronet took to his bed.

Whether the former event had anything to do with the latter, whether Sir Charles, feeling his importance as an invalid in the house dwindle before the encroaching claims and necessities of the tiny heir, determined to make a strong effort to retain his hold on the

sympathies and attentions of his friends, it would be difficult to say.

Certain it is, that without any special increase of malady beyond a slight cold, he shut himself up in his own room, and, complaining of rheumatism in his limbs and joints, he eventually took to his bed.

The physician at the time in attendance, was exceedingly annoyed, and spoke to Victoria plainly on the subject.

"He must have these notions got out of his head somehow," he had said. "He can walk as well as you or I. We must get him away to one of the German spas, and persuade him the waters will be good for his limbs. If he declines fresh air and exercise, he must die without fail."

And Victoria, looking at the white, wee

face and frail form of her new treasure, and thinking, perhaps, that mountain air and mineral waters might help to invigorate and develop the fragile little being into something akin to health, gladly planned a short trip to the Swiss lakes and mountains, and a subsequent visit to some spa on their homeward journey.

It was such a tiny, weakly baby, with large, dark eyes, and an old pained, drawn look on its little mouth. Perhaps Victoria in all her life had never experienced such deep, true joy as when she first looked down on her baby-boy's face, and felt he was all her own. Then, following on this deep thrill of happiness, came another and a sadder thought, a terrible presentiment that a joy so sweet, so pure could not be a lasting joy, that this, too, was an

apple of Sodom to crumble into dust at her touch.

"He will surely die," she whispered to herself, kissing the little waxen arms and fingers, "he has so little hold on life, he will pass away like all my other hopes, and leave me desolate."

Sir Charles had shown comparatively little delight at the birth of his son and heir.

"I suppose," he had said, as he heard Victoria for once venturing to assert herself and giving necessary directions with regard to the comfort and well-being of her boy and his attendants in the house, "I suppose you will all be wishing me dead and out of the way now. I had little enough attention before, Heaven knows! I expect none whatever

now, none whatever, not even my meals properly served."

So he had taken first to his room and then to his bed, and Victoria, with her heart in the nursery and her hopes hanging on the frail thread of her boy's being and thriving, found her attendance on her husband, with his sick-room fancies and whims, more than ever irksome and insupportable.

How it was they succeeded in getting him out of his room and on board the Ostend packet she scarcely knew. The doctor (a great favourite for the time being) had exerted his influence to the utmost, alternately threatening and entreating.

"I shall have to come every day and galvanise you, Sir Charles," he had threatened,

"your malady will require some such treatment if you persist in weakening your limbs and muscles in this way." "I shall positively decline seeing you again, unless my orders are carried out to the very letter," he had said on another occasion. And Sir Charles, wearied with the contention and, perhaps, feeling himself more of an invalid than either wife or doctor imagined, accustomed as they were to his daily peevishness and complaining, yielded the point, and with a retinue of servants, a well-made litter and a "prescribed diet," they started on their autumn trip.

A surprising change had come over Miriam since the birth of the little boy. A sudden awakening of genial, human affection seemed to have taken place in her heart. Her feelings towards Victoria were considerably

mollified, and one might even have imagined she was glad and thankful for the outlet thus afforded her for what little genuine love and sympathy remained in her somewhat narrowed heart.

She delighted to speak of the wee baby as "My little brother," and even condoned Victoria's offence of instituting "that Freestone girl" as one of baby's attendants. She was seen at times with various small articles of baby attire projecting from her capacious work-basket, and ever and anon she would advise Victoria severely and dictatorially as to the correct diet for infants. Occasionally she would make a sort of half apology for the unwonted interest she was manifesting in her home ties and surroundings.

"If Lady Victoria bestows proper atten-

tion on my father, she can have no time to devote to such cares as these, and it is not right that my little brother should be left entirely to nurses and servants. Besides, Lady Victoria herself needs advice in many ways with regard to babies. She is very young, and cannot possibly have had the experience I have in such matters."

So she went on advising and apologizing, and Victoria gratefully accepted the change, to whatever cause it might be due, thankful for anything which tended to soften the rough edges of Miriam's temper towards herself, and placed their relationship upon a more amicable footing.

So, on the whole, things went more smoothly in the Baronet's household. The Rev. Anthony Everhard, too, had spent much of his time at

the house in Eaton Square during his stay in London, but it must be questioned whether Miriam's attractions had drawn him thither. Victoria's troubles and her forlornness had taken strong hold on his sympathies, and partly with the hope of rendering her some real spiritual service, and partly from genuine friendliness for one whom he had known under such totally different circumstances, he went again and again to the house.

This further tended to increase Miriam's good-temper with herself and the world at large. Generally speaking, her clerical friends, however charmed they might be with her earnestness and really self-denying activity in works of charity, after a time would become somewhat remiss in their attentions, and eventually discover themselves to be

"too much hampered by their work to allow themselves the pleasures and relaxations of private friendships."

Everhard, however, seemed to be an exception to this rule, and became, if possible, more assiduous in his attentions as his intimacy with the family increased, until Miriam began to discover that he was "not a bad-looking man, although somewhat thin; that he belonged to one of the best families in England—not that such matters ought to weigh with any one—was most spiritually minded and earnest, and much to be pitied for the lonely life he was compelled to lead as a bachelor, and without any near relations." So she would ask him again and again to conduct for her some particular in-door service for the servants of the household, or some

private Bible class of her own for teachers or shop girls.

On these occasions Everhard would beg, as a personal favour, that Lady Victoria would be present. "It will distract your mind from other cares," he had more than once suggested kindly, and Victoria, with gladder thoughts in her heart than she had known for many a weary day and night, would now and then consent to assist at these, often hastily improvised, religious services.

At such times Everhard would conduct the praying and preaching with a special view to her edification and comfort. "You have, no doubt," he would say, looking up and down the row of stiff, neatly dressed maidservants, and occasionally fixing a pointed glance at the somewhat roseate features of George, the

butler, "you have, no doubt, in your daily life a multiplicity of small cares which tax your strength and courage, and make you feel your lot to be a hard one; you are lonely and sad at heart, you lack sympathy or friendship, you have uncongenial surroundings, and a work in life for which you feel yourself altogether unsuited. Take comfort, my brother or sister; the cross in your lot is sent to teach you the vanity, the unsatisfactoriness, of all that is of the earth earthy; to bid you set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth; to prevent you loving too fondly, or clasping too tightly, things which must perish in their using, or that taken into your bosom will sting and bite as a very serpent."

It may, however, be doubted whether

Victoria were likely to "take comfort" from such considerations as these. Everhard, at any rate, did his best, and could only bring forth from his treasury such new things, or old things, as he found he possessed.

Miriam was at times not altogether pleased with these discourses, and, as her wont was, spoke her mind freely.

"Dear me! Mr. Everhard," she had said on one occasion, "I really do not see what cross George or the maids can have to bear in this house, provided they do their duty. I am sure they are more indulged here than they would be in many houses I could name, and I consider them specially favoured with regard to religious privileges."

And Victoria meantime went on her way "rejoicing with trembling." As baby's life

ebbed and flowed, so ebbed and flowed her hopes and fears. As a very star of promise she hailed this feeble little ray of light which had struggled through the mists and clouds, encompassing her dull, grey life with its dreary, unvarying round of duties.

CHAPTER XVII.

ON one point Llewellyn March was resolute. However much discontent he might feel with himself and the mode of life into which circumstances for a time had driven him, he determined no signs of it should be shown in his home letters, writing long, cheerful accounts to old Newton and Max in turn, of his daily life and occupations, diaries almost, in their copiousness of description and fullness of detail.

"When will the new *régime* commence at Castle Mount?" he had written to Newton,

longing for news of Anna, and not daring to mention her name. "You seem afraid to speak of my old home to me now, and I am positively thirsting for news of the dear old place. How are the Castle stables getting on? Does Redfern reign supreme there, and has he still his old-fashioned notions with regard to nitre as the sovereign cure for every sort of ill to which horses are heir? Do you remember the battles we used to have almost daily over the diet and physicking?

"By the way, talking of horses, I have had one of the most—no, I will say *the* most magnificent creature presented to me that, I believe, has ever been bred and trained. I wish I could describe him, but know that no description of mine can bring before you the glorious animal in its strength and beauty; I

have tried to sketch him, but cannot succeed to my liking. He is nearly five years old, and stands about 16 hands, dark chestnut, shading into black at the mane and tail, small head, straight, slender limbs, and blood and race written in every line and curve.

"A truly sad circumstance has brought him into my possession. Do you remember, when we met at Gravelotte, I spoke to you of Arnold von Durlach, the Captain of our Guard, and told you what a really good fellow he was? I am staying now with his people here, in Brandenburgh. Poor Arnold came off with two or three nasty sabre cuts in one of the French sallies from Metz, and a very ugly shell wound, a fragment lodging in his thigh. This he treated somewhat lightly at first, and was disposed to neglect, but subsequently

dangerous symptoms set in, and he was compelled to have the limb amputated. He wrote to me from Halbensfurt, where his home is, a very piteous letter. 'Herr von Marche, come to me here, I beg; I have a very solemn charge to commit into your hands.' I had obtained my discharge some six weeks previously, and having really taken a strong liking to him for his simple, honest heartedness, and besides this, feeling deeply grateful to him for the unvarying kindness he had shown to me and my comrades, I started at once for Brandenburgh. I had not heard then of the serious nature of his wound, and was terribly shocked when poor Arnold met me at his father's gate, leaning on a crutch. He took me into the house, and presented me to his father, mother and sister; then, with-

out a word, beckoned me to follow him to the rear of the house where, in a little paddock, this splendid animal I have been describing to you was tossing his small, glossy head, and stretching his straight, strong limbs. Arnold twisted his fingers into the long silken mane, and I could see the tears running down his cheeks. 'Herr von Marche,' he said, 'he belongs to you. I have seen men try to ride, and I have seen them ride. You are one of those who know how; take my Steinmetz. Do not thank me; it was a simple duty to give him a worthy master.' What could I say; I could only grasp the poor fellow's hand, and promise that Steinmetz and I would never part from each other, and that in all my wanderings and changes of fortune he and I would be

companions and friends. Arnold had his pedigree carefully written out in his pocket-book; it seems he was presented by General Steinmetz, when a colt, to Arnold, and carried him well through the fields of Courcelles and Gravelotte, and no end of skirmishes and repulses. I need not say how proud I am of this trust he has confided to me.

"Poor fellow! he has had much to try him of late. However, I am glad to say affairs have now taken a brighter turn for him. Before the war broke out he was on the point of being married to a young lady living in the town; but of course, when he was ordered on active service the marriage was necessarily postponed, and the young lady must have had an anxious time of it. After his return and the loss of his limb, he

considered it was his duty to release his *fiancée* from her promises, and wrote to her to that effect. I am glad to say, however, she refused to be released, and, after many *pros* and *cons*, and a great deal of arranging and persuading, Arnold has given way, and the marriage is fixed for to-morrow at noon.

"Vast preparations are going on in this simple household. Von Durlach, Arnold's father, is one of the largest landowners about here, and although I should imagine his yearly income must be a large one, his household is conducted on the simplest, homeliest principles. His wife is nothing more nor less than a first-rate housekeeper, accurate and final in her judgment on butter, cheeses, and all sorts of poultry and their prices.

"Her two daughters assist her in the management of her house, with knitting-pins for ever in their hands or sticking out of their side-pockets.

"Bertha, the elder, is stout, round-eyed, and flaxen-haired, and very silent, answering and questioning in monosyllables. Lotta, the younger, is also stout, round-eyed, flaxen-haired, but very talkative, asking questions for the sake of hearing her own little bird-like voice, and invaluable to her mother, I should imagine, for the superior manner in which she can lecture the maid-servants, and bring them back to a sense of their duty.

"Halbensfurt is a very tiny, very uninteresting town, of the usual German type. The everlasting canal, running through the streets

of many-gabled and heavy-looking houses, a very second-rate theatre claims the greater part of the attention of the men, and coffee-drinking and gossip forms the staple diet of the women (with the addition, I suppose, of the usual smoked geese and liver sausages).

"You would smile, I think, to see me sitting here, at the close of the day, with a pipe as long as Arnold's—everything in the room is smoked blue—listening to the lengthy discussions which occur nightly between father and son.

"I generally turn over to the ladies' side of the table (you know my old penchant for ladies' society), and could not for a long time bring myself to acquiesce in the pipe-lighting in their presence.

"When, however, I found I was only

making the whole family and their friends uncomfortable by my stubbornness, I was compelled to give in, and consent to be fitted up with a pipe and pouch like the rest.

"Our supper is ended by half-past nine or ten at the latest. Some friends of Arnold or his father generally come in for this meal, and join in the smoke and talk afterwards. The ladies of the household themselves assist in clearing the supper-table, then produce their everlasting knitting-pins, and sit silent, or occasionally speaking to each other in monosyllables for the rest of the evening, while the men do all the talking.

"Then commence the most wonderful discussions, dissertations and propounding of theories it has ever been my lot to listen to, the invincible nasal drawling of didactic

Titans' (as the Chelsea philosopher phrases it so expressively), explorations into 'infinite extinct continents, filled with ponderous thorny inanities, and awful attempts to spin on all manner of wheels road-harness out of split cobwebs.'

"I used to think in the old days that Max Trego and I were famous hands at splitting cobwebs, but I don't recollect ever making the awful attempt to put them together in the shape of road-harness, as these 'didactic Titans' are in the daily habit of doing.

"My colloquial knowledge of their language is not sufficient to enable me to enter without difficulty and effort into the mazes and intricacies of their arguments and theories, so I remain a contented and much interested listener.

"About eleven o'clock the ladies retire, with a brief 'good night.' The discussion by this time has reached its height. Several of the combatants have retired from the fray, worsted, or at least silenced, and pipes are going furiously. Occasionally I am appealed to by one or both sides as to what is the view taken in England on the point under discussion, and sometimes, driven into a corner, I am compelled to admit I have never had the good fortune to hear the subject discussed in my own country, whereupon, with an expressive shrug of their shoulders, and a growl of discontent or commiseration from the aforesaid nasal organs, the Titans return to their stone-hurling once more.

"Here is a budget for you. Will you

have patience to wade through it to the end? Let me have a similar one in return, with all the 'sweet home' news you can collect for me. Do not address to me here, for I leave the day after the wedding for Spa.

"Arnold tells me that one of the ambulance doctors, who worked hardest after Gravelotte, has gone there to recruit, and there is just the possibility (of course, nothing more) that I may hear something of Elliott through him. Kindly send all letters to the *poste restante* there."

CHAPTER XVIII.

NEWTON sent this letter on to Max, with a few lines, leaving it to his discretion as to whether or not it should be shown to Miss Colet, at the same time making many enquiries as to Miss Colet's health, and if there were any likelihood of the young lady assuming the reins of government at Castle Mount.

"It is a thousand pities," he wrote, "for this place to be so long without either master or mistress, and I am beginning to feel its sole charge almost too great a responsibility.

I am at a loss on many points almost every hour of the day. So many things are at an absolute stand-still for want of a final decision, which really I have no power to give on my own account. I have discharged about half the household servants, and this has caused great discontent in the neighbourhood, as they are most of them from the adjoining villages; the tradespeople also are complaining, and justly, of the low ebb to which their trade is reduced on account of the Castle remaining so long unoccupied."

Max, when he had read these letters, showed them to his mother, and then at once handed them to Anna, anxiously watching her face, as she read the lines.

Anna had not improved, as they had hoped

she would, with the bright summer weather. She was very white, very thin, very silent now. Her figure always drooping, her movements slow and languid. She took little or no interest in her old occupations and pursuits, but seemed as one standing afar off, watching the game of life played out by others.

Like some athlete who, having gathered together all his strength for one final mighty effort to win the race set before him, and, having failed, stands back to watch others contending in games in which he might well have borne a part; so had Anna gathered together her strength, so had she failed, so was she now standing back to let those contend, who would, for the prizes life had to bestow.

If only they could have let her alone she might have somewhat recovered her old tone and strength, she might have gathered up the broken fragments of her life, and have so pieced them together that only a very close observer could have detected the flaws and joins. She might have overcome her old passionate love for Llewellyn March so far as to have met him with calmness, and have given her hand to him in friendship; she could have so schooled herself as to have met his wife, should he have one, with kindliness and courtesy, and his children she knew she could welcome and love as his peculiar treasures. But this inheritance for ever staring her in the face! How could she put forth her hand and rob him of all his earthly possessions—how enter upon and enjoy the

wealth whose loss had cost him his all of love and happiness? So from day to day her life had gone on in a languid, listless, silent fashion. Her harp untouched, her palette and brushes dusty and laid by, and her poor old pensioners, who had been accustomed to go to her for comfort and counsel under all sorts of tribulation, were met with a wan, unvarying smile, or a weary sigh, instead of the bright, strong words of comfort and hope she had been wont to accord them.

Anna read the letters through, slowly and quietly, her head drooping, her eyes heavy with their weight of unshed tears. "I am as nothing to him," she thought, with a sharp, bitter pain at her heart. "He does not even mention my name." She handed back the letters to Max without a word.

Max waited a moment, then looked at her gravely and enquiringly; Anna covered her face with both hands, she knew what was coming now.

"Anna, dear," Max began, "I must answer Newton's letter—what message shall I give him from you?"

"Why will you not let me alone?" moaned Anna. "Why will you not let me stay here in this dear old home?"

Mrs. Trego was winding some soft Andalusian wool into a ball, she laid it down quickly, and came round to the girl's side.

"Anna, dear," she said pleadingly, "you can see from Mr. March's letter how anxious he is that the place should be occupied."

"Mother," interrupted Max, crossly, "I would far sooner you appealed to Anna's

right feeling and reason than to any such nonsense as that!"

Mrs. Trego returned to her chair and her wool-work, suppressed immediately.

Anna looked up, white and miserable. "Must I go, Max?" she said, pitifully.

"What do you think yourself, Anna?" he replied. "What does your own common sense tell you? Ought such a place as Castle Mount and its large estates be left in the hands of servants and hirelings? Is it right for you to throw your responsibilities and duties even on Newton's shoulders, honourable and upright as he is? I did not think, after your training in this house, you would need to ask such a question."

Anna sank back wearily in her chair. Why contend any longer; she looked towards

Mrs. Trego, her face was sad, and her eyes averted; she looked at Max, and his features seemed hard and resolute.

"Yes, she must give in, there was no help for it."

She remembered once, many years ago, to have seen a picture of a tiny bird flying over a wild waste of waters, and in her own imagination, she had woven its tender little story, how as the waters rose high above the highest trees, it had made for the summit of a green hill, how as it drew near, and thought it had gained a very haven of rest, the floods rose up, and surging over the grassy mound, hid it away for ever in their bosom. Then the little bird's wings drooped; for a moment, it held itself poised high in the air; then it looked up at the wide desolate expanse of

sky, and down at the wide desolate expanse of the waters, and knew that it must meet its fate, for its wings were weary and its strength was gone. It was a childish fancy, nothing more, but it came back vividly to Anna now, and she felt like that little bird with its last refuge engulfed before its eyes, and the great waters drawing it down into their bosom. Yes she would give in now, she had fought and struggled against her fate, but it had been stronger than she, and stood before her quiet, inexorable, triumphant, with a smile on its lips and the cypress in its hand.

Yes, she would go now, and she drove back the tears from her eyes, and clasped her hands tightly together to still their trembling. There should be no more suing for mercy, nor piteous cries to be let alone.

"When must I go Max?" she asked, looking up with a face at once so resolute, and so forlorn, that Max was startled, and for the moment wished Castle Mount and Llewellyn March, and poor old Newton also, at the bottom of the sea, or in any other stronghold from which they would have no chance of escape to torment Anna and himself.

However, he did not say so. He looked at her keenly for a moment, and then repeated her question slowly—

"When must you go? I do not think there need be any immediate hurry about your going. Fix your own time, go when you like, only I think it would take a load off Newton's mind, if he knew for certain you would be down there in a month or two. My mother of course will go with you, and I

may be able to run down for a week or so in the autumn—that is, if you will have me for a guest," he added with an attempt at a smile.

Anna made no reply to his question, she said very slowly with the same set look on her face—

"It had better be done at once."

"What had better be done, Anna?" asked Max in his straightforward way; "see here" and he took her soft little fingers in his strong firm hand, "I can't have you hurried and worried in this way out of your old home for all the castles in England. I will tell Newton to keep things going just as they are, for another three months, and then he will hear from me again."

Anna sat still and silent for a few moments,

then she gently withdrew her hand, and went to the window, looking out on the grand old cedar with its rugged boughs, and "dark green layers of shade," on the patched faded lawn, on the well-filled, if somewhat neglected and tangled flower-beds.

"Max, dear," she said softly, "I should like to see this dear old garden once more in its autumn colouring. Let me wait till the Virginian creeper changes into coral and gold, then I will say my last good-bye to it all."

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CHAPTER XIX.

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and hotelkeepers complaining l
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Llewellyn's first visit was t

office. He found there one letter awaiting him —from Newton. A curiously worded letter, beginning with all sorts of odds and ends and scraps of news, and implying that the writer had something else of importance to communicate, but really did not know how to set about it. That something else came at the very end of the letter—

"Did Mr. March know, had he heard, that Lady Victoria *Oldfield* (with the name underscored a great many times) would be at Spa shortly, to stay for some few weeks. At least, so he had heard through her people at Pentallack."

Llewellyn, as he read this, understood the reason of his kind old friend's circumlocution.

"He wishes to spare me needless pain," he thought, "he imagines after the childish

manner in which I have already behaved, I have not strength to stand another shock." Then he kept repeating to himself the name over and over again, "Victoria Oldfield, Victoria Oldfield," as though to drive it into his brain, that she whom he had loved so passionately, believed in so blindly, had given herself to another man, and that no bridge could span the gulf between them now.

This was the first he had heard of Victoria since their parting. Often and often he had said to himself, "when next I hear of her it will be as a married woman," but he had been utterly unable to picture her as such. Now even that his words were fulfilled, and though he repeated again and again her married name, he felt himself as far off

as ever from the realisation of the truth. "Oldfield, Oldfield!" what family could this be. He knew the Sussex Oldfields, and the Yorkshire Oldfields, and there was that Guillotte Oldfield of the 10th Hussars, a fast fellow, who had been compelled to sell out and eventually had gone to Ceylon to plant coffee—but he had married a pretty little Cingalese. He knew every member of the Sussex Oldfields, and could not call to mind one marriageable man among them. The head of the house was old and widowed for a third time, and the sons were minors. Of the Yorkshire Oldfields, he remembered there remained but Sir Charles, the hypochondriacal baronet of Maddingley, and stoop as low as she would, he knew the Victoria

Cathrow whom he had loved and honoured would never stoop so low as that.

An irresistible desire took possession of him (not alone of curiosity)—a deep, strong longing to look once more in that woman's face, whose life had been at one time bound up in his own.

"One look in her eyes," he thought, "will tell me all that is in her heart, whether the old memories haunt her still, or whether she has found peace and happiness in her new life." So he lingered on at Spa day after day, noting each new arrival, restless, watchful, expectant, knowing well that he was only preparing for himself some fresh draught of bitterness by so lingering, and yet unable to tear himself away. Wandering from the Rédoute to the station, from the station to the

Rédoute, visiting all the springs in turn, and eventually taking up his quarters at the Hotel d'Otrante, wisely judging that, whatever Lady Victoria's final arrangements might be, she would no doubt, in the first instance, secure accommodation in a comfortable hotel.

Thus he waited and watched; and seated one afternoon at the open window of the front room he occupied, this is what he saw: A carriage and pair driving slowly along, stop at the door of the hotel; in this carriage were seated four persons or five, if the diminutive little being in its nurse's arms could be counted as one. A lady sat next the nurse dressed in a plaid Ulster, and wearing a large, badly-trimmed hat, and an elderly gentleman, white-faced, with discontent and selfishness written in every line and

curve of his features, reclined on the opposite seat, and a lady, in neat, dark, but elegant travelling dress, sat by his side.

Llewellyn could not see her face for the thin, gauzy veil she wore, but something in her walk—slow, graceful, dignified—something in the bend of her neck and the carriage of her head, told him at once that this was Victoria. And there, by her side, was Sir Charles Oldfield, of Maddingley!

It was undeniable now, there was no escaping from the fact that these two were husband and wife! And as he watched this lady giving directions to the numerous servants who swarmed about them with rugs and luggage, a strange feeling crept into his heart—was it disgust, or something akin to contempt for the woman who could thus give her youth

and beauty into the hands of an old man tottering on the verge of the grave—who could hold herself in such low esteem as to consider she received from him an equivalent for the brightness, the grace, the womanhood she bestowed on him, in his peevishness, and wrinkles and riches—who had been true, perhaps, to her order and the principles in which she had been reared, but false to herself and her better instincts?

And as he looked the scales fell from his eyes, the haze faded from his senses, the ideal being whom he had so blindly loved and worshipped, dissolved into the clouds and mists out of which she was born, and Victoria stood before him in flesh and blood and Parisian attire, divested of all rainbow hues.

Yet, if the truth be told, Victoria at this time was more worthy of a man's love and devotion than she had ever been before; for under her trials and difficulties, with a sombre sky overhead, and a dusty path beneath her feet, her heart had grown larger, and her spirit truer and stronger than it could ever have grown in a land of sunshine and flowers.

Llewellyn did not see this, could not know it, all he saw and knew was, that she whom he had idolised as the fairest and noblest of her sex, had done a deed which the plainest and meanest might well have scorned. He could have pardoned her falseness towards him if only she had been true to herself; had she but been true to the lowest instincts which she

possessed in common with all womankind, he could still have believed that her falseness was not part of herself, only a garment she had borrowed and striven to fit on and wear, but which in due time she would lay on one side for her own natural robes of truth and purity. As it was, however, her falsehood stood out now in harsh dark lines as part and parcel of a nature which he did not dream had lain hidden under a mask of beauty; not as a flaw in a precious stone which the skill of a lapidary might cut out or efface, but as a flaw in a piece of coloured glass which for a long time had been set in gold and esteemed among men as a diamond or ruby.

So he closed the window and came away with a sigh and a smile; a sigh for the poor

little plaster cast which lay shattered and broken at his feet, and a smile at his own ignorance and blind folly which had so persistently mistaken it for sculptured marble.

CHAPTER XX.

VICTORIA'S stay among the Swiss lakes had been shorter than she had at first intended; Sir Charles had complained loudly that the air was too strong for his throat and lungs, and the tiny baby did not improve as both mother and sister had hoped.

"It's the goat's milk," said Miriam, decisively, "I told you from the first it would not suit the child."

"It's these confounded mountain breezes," said Sir Charles. "I told you they would

bring me to death's door, and if that baby cannot stand them how do you suppose I can, I, who have been a confirmed invalid for the last twenty years?"

So the boxes were packed and strapped once more, and they started for Spa, travelling by slow and easy stages. Victoria with a growing pain at her heart, each time she looked at the white worn little face in its splendid laces and embroideries, and Miriam industriously "improving the occasion" by dropping French and German "leaflets" in every available corner of trains or stations.

Oddly as it may sound, Miriam had begun to be somewhat of a comfort to Victoria in those days. Her interest in her little brother was unbounded, and Victoria could not but feel grateful to her for her unvarying kind-

ness and attention to him. Their common love for the poor sickly little being had in a measure drawn these two, in all else so widely apart, towards each other, and Victoria with doubts and difficulties pressing and increasing upon her from day to day, was oftentimes glad to appeal to Miriam's matter-of-factness and decision of character for counsel and support.

With her father, however, Miriam would have little or nothing to do. "No," she had said decidedly on one occasion, in reply to Victoria's request that she would for one afternoon sit with and amuse Sir Charles, and leave her free to pet and fondle the little one. "No! I have had eleven good years of it, and don't intend to wear myself out with his nonsense any longer. You knew what

you were undertaking when you married him; I remember perfectly well telling you he had killed my mother with his fancies and whims, and no doubt he will kill you if he live long enough."

And Miriam proceeded, with the fussiness almost of a maiden aunt, to superintend the wants and requirements of the little heir, and Victoria, scarcely repressing a pang of maternal jealousy, went back to her husband's arm-chair to listen for the hundredth time to the same old story of weak nerves and want of appetite, and the hardships and inconveniences this continental tour of theirs had entailed upon him.

But although the infant derived little or no benefit from the mountain air and mineral waters, Sir Charles certainly in some mar-

vellous unexplained manner recovered the use of his limbs, and his well-appointed litter was carried about from place to place simply as an inconvenient piece of luggage. He appeared indeed almost to have taken a turn in the opposite direction, and the ball once set rolling they found some difficulty in stopping it. If the slightest inconvenience arose to them in any shape or form at their hotel, or in the rooms they had taken, he would insist on changing their quarters at once, oftentimes to the great fatigue and annoyance of Victoria and Miriam, who began to feel themselves somewhat over-taxed with the care and supervision of the two invalids.

For it had already come to this, Victoria's first-born was no longer looked upon as a

growing thriving baby, to be tossed and played with, but a tender little plant, to be carefully nurtured and cherished that its frail life might be prolonged.

Fresh air, the best of nurses, good doctors, and the purest of milk, seemed to have no beneficial effect on him. He daily grew whiter and weaker, and Miriam became daily more and more irritable as the thought forced itself upon her mind that the little being who had somehow crept into a hollow place in her heart was slowly but surely slipping away from them all.

As for Victoria, she could scarcely bring herself to believe that so terrible a sorrow as this was coming upon her, that this little star which had shone out so bravely for her would so soon be quenched in the blackness and

doubt of the grave. Every other interest gave way before this, her all absorbing anxiety and terror, every duty, into which she was not absolutely driven, was neglected or forgotten, to tend this one little being who had brought such a vastness and depth of love with it. Even Llewellyn March and her old love and old regret came but seldom into her thoughts in those days of alternate hope and fear, and Lady Mary Cathrow's long letters filled with Pentallack news and gossip lay unanswered and neglected, or worse still, unread in her drawer.

Had these letters been read as carefully as Lady Mary no doubt expected them to be, Victoria would not have been ignorant of the fact with which Miriam confronted her on

the second morning of their arrival at Spa, namely that Mr. March—"Your Mr. March," she had said, addressing Victoria—was staying at the same hotel as themselves. "I heard it," she said, "a minute ago, from George, who saw Mr. March at the post office asking for his letters, and of course I made enquiries as to where he had put up."

"My Mr. March?" repeated Victoria, flushing crimson, with indignation and anger.

"Yes, your Mr. March," reiterated Miriam, the irrepressible. "I mean the Mr. March you threw over to marry my father!"

There was no standing up before this terrible woman, with her plain-speaking and

harsh positive voice. Victoria as usual shrank back defeated and silent, and Miriam went on—

"It will be awkward for you if you should happen to meet on the stairs."

Fortunately Sir Charles came in at that moment, leaning heavily on his servant's shoulder. "Victoria," he said, in his usual tone of complaint, "I can't stand the noise in this house, my nerves are shaken every time a door is banged or a window shut. The draughts, too, are enough to cut one in pieces. How you came to select such a place for an invalid, I can't imagine."

"We might find rooms in the town, or a furnished house, we have servants enough to wait on us," said Victoria, so eagerly, that Miriam looked up and nodded meaningly, "I

think the hotel delightful, and the attendance very good, but I can easily understand why some people should prefer a furnished house."

Victoria's only answer was to leave the room.

CHAPTER XXI.

ON the day after the arrival of the Oldfields, Llewellyn started on the mission, which indeed had been his one and only object in going to Spa, the search for the ambulance doctor, of whom Von Durlach had spoken to him. On enquiry at the address given him in the town, he found that this doctor not having derived much benefit from the Spa waters, had gone on to Aix-la-Chapelle, to try the springs there. Thither Llewellyn determined to follow him, and committing Steinmetz with many and strict

injunctions to the charge of the landlord of his hotel, he was half way on his road to Aix before the Oldfields were out of their rooms.

A wondrous change had passed over him within the last twenty-four hours—a change so wondrous, so sudden, that he was almost at a loss to account for it in his own mind. What was it, what had happened after all? He had stood at an open window and watched a young lady alight from a carriage and walk up a flight of steps, with her husband by her side; he had not even seen her face, most assuredly had not "looked in her eyes," nor touched her hand, and scarcely indeed heard the tones of her voice, yet that five minutes' glimpse of her had wrought a change in him he could not have believed a score of years could have brought to pass. Yesterday morn-

ing he had imagined he loved this young lady as deeply and truly as a man could love woman, and to-day she was as nothing to him; the spell was broken, the glamour of love was gone, the charm which had lulled him to sleep and sweet dreams had lost its power—he stood once more awakened, disenchanted, disenthralled.

Yet what had brought this sudden change to pass—and he strove to probe his heart to its very depths—was it that time and separation had silently and surely done their work of healing all unknown to himself, or was it that the sense of possession and ownership now gone, he could look with a calm dispassionate eye on his much-coveted treasure, and discover the flaws in it, and wherein it failed of being a master-piece? He did not know;

he scarcely cared to answer these questions; all he knew and cared was that his idol had crumbled into dust in its very shrine, and he had no power to restore it to its pristine glory, no thought nor wish even to mourn and wail over it; all that remained to be done was to sweep away its ashes out of sight into darkness and oblivion.

True, it had left in its fall a terrible sense of desolateness and heart-emptiness, of weariness and disappointment—yet who was to blame for this? Not the poor image (so he reasoned with himself) before whom he had burned his incense so lavishly, and to whom he had offered the brightest, best treasures his heart had to bestow; but he, the God-gifted man, who could stoop to so low a creed, so base a religion—who could create

out of wood, or clay, or stone, so poor a goddess, and gilding it with his love, and colouring it with his fancies, fall down before it and worship.

At Gravelotte he had spoken to Anna, in no measured terms of contempt, of himself, and the way in which he had borne the loss of his love and happiness; but the spell was upon him even as he spoke, and Anna had been quick enough to discover it. The chances are that had Victoria stood before him then, free, and with the old words of enchantment on her lips, he would have gone back to his old worship and allegiance. Fate, however, had decreed it otherwise, and the bitterest awakening of all—the awakening to a sense of the blindness and ignorance of his worship, and the unworthiness of his deity,

had been reserved for this moment, and now overwhelmed him with self-scorn and contempt—deeper scorn, more lasting contempt, than he could ever bring himself to bear towards his poor, cast-away idol.

Anyhow he was awakened, and thank God for that! There should be no more mournings and repinings over the vanished glory of his young life; no more fitting on his head of "a sorrow's crown of sorrow;" no more waste of precious time and strength and purpose, in running hither and thither to deaden thought and pain; "let the dead bury the dead," he exclaimed, aloud. "Arise thou and do thy life's work." True. The young, light-hearted Llewellyn March, with his trustfulness and brightness, could never come back again to dream his golden dreams,

and weave his wondrous imaginings—but what of that? Might not a better, truer, nobler man rise up in his stead, with higher aspirations, more earnest purpose, and more steadfast aim? "I will just try this one chance of finding out poor Elliott's fate," he resolved, "then, with God's help, I will take my life into my own hands once more, and do better things than I have yet done. It is true there will be an ugly gap in it, an ill-written, marred, and badly-spelt chapter, which I have no power to blot out nor destroy, but with God's help it shall be the only one; I have been wounded in the fight, and the scars — deep, ugly, disfiguring — must remain to the end of my life. But for all that, I may yet do some good work in the world, honest, earnest, lasting work, though

not, perhaps, the work I would have chosen to do in the first flush of my young bright days. Let me gather together what forces I have left: a maimed man must work with his feet, a halt man must work with his hands —what does it matter, maimed or halt, so long as his work in life be done!"

CHAPTER XXII.

LLEWELLYN'S mission at Aix was quickly accomplished, ending, as he had surmised it would, in failure and disappointment. The doctor, a Swiss, who had nearly worn himself out with his devotion to the poor sick and wounded soldiers, could not call to mind any Englishman answering to Llewellyn's description of his friend. He had attended some two or three English after the battle of Gravelotte, he recollected, but they were fighting on the Prussian side, and were young and boyish looking. So there

was no help for it, Llewellyn must give up all hopes now, for every possible means of discovering Elliott's fate had been tried and had failed.

He spent two or three days with the Swiss doctor—a clever, kindly old man—at Aix, much interested in the accounts he gave of his work in the field-hospitals, and comparing notes with him on many matters of personal experience during the war.

"What did you want in such scenes, Monsieur Marche?" the old man asked him with direct simplicity, "your heart seems to have been as much on one side as on the other. The pay was not good enough to tempt the poorest among you rich Englishmen. It must have been for play and sport, it seems to me, that you came?"

"Aye," said Llewellyn, parrying the question, and thinking only of his own shortcomings, "we play with matters of life and death and make sport of them, and our short-lived follies and frivolities we make matters of life and death to us. That is our wisdom."

Then he thanked the kind old doctor heartily for his courtesy and hospitality, and started on a brief circuit through the quaint old city, before he set off on his return to Spa.

This was not Llewellyn's first visit to Aix. Some ten years previously he and Max Trego, making the round of the chief cities of Europe, had gone somewhat out of their way to get a glimpse of the ancient cathedral, and pay their tribute to the memory of Carolus Magnus.

Thoughts crowded upon him, and vividly came back the recollection of those days, as he wandered in and out the quiet churches and about the older part of the town, with its marvels of history and tradition wreathed about it still—recollections of the bright spring morning, when he and Max set off on their travels; how, in the fullness of his almost boyish friendship, he had insisted on taking with him only the same allowance of money as Max could afford from his slender income; how they had agreed that, when half their stock was spent, they would at once turn round and make for home; how they had limited their weekly expenditure to a certain sum; and how, on arriving at Brussels, Llewellyn had spent the whole of one week's allowance and half of the next in the pur-

chase of a Bartolozzi he had discovered in a side street off the Montagne de la Cour; upon which Max had seen the necessity of adopting stringent measures, and had insisted upon taking sole and entire charge of their funds for the future.

"You may write an epic poem superlatively well, Llewellyn March," he had said on that occasion, "and I have no doubt are divine upon the piano and violin, but as Chancellor of the Exchequer you would bring the most flourishing country to the verge of bankruptcy, and," this with a very wry face, "if you go on at this rate we shall have to cut Austria and Venice out of our programme altogether."

Llewellyn almost smiled over these reminiscences of that young, bright spring-

tide. How long ago it all seemed, what waves of joy and sorrow had swept over him since then, what crowding of hopes and disappointments, of longings and bitterness, into that small space of life which had intervened since those old days of fun and frolic. What a land of promise he appeared to be entering upon then, what a glorious future he would make for himself, what a life of triumph he would live!

"I don't want to be a book-worm, Max, and I don't mean to be a pedant," he had exclaimed, out of the fullness of his enthusiasm, "but I want to know all that it is possible for a man to know. I want my brain to be as strong as a man's can be, and my heart to grow as large as a human heart can grow. I want to live ten lives in my one."

And Max had brought him down from the clouds with his usual blunt straightforwardness.

"I have not the slightest doubt, March, that you intend to develop into a real Crichton, 'all perfect, finished to the finger-nail.' But wouldn't it be as well to begin at once? Life is short, and you know you are not quite up to the mark at present. I shouldn't care for you to attempt to coach a boy of mine in indeterminate analysis, and you must own you are terribly shaky, even in the matter of cubic equations."

So the happy, joyous days had slipped by, and Llewellyn March, wandering about that same old city of Aix, as grey, and brown and quaint as ever, could scarcely realise that he, pacing there with sober, almost middle-aged,

steps, and looking about him with calm, critical eyes, had once been that light-hearted and ambitious boy, throwing his all of earnestness and hope into every hour of the day.

He had missed Max and his strong, clear intellect terribly throughout these days of misfortune and loneliness.

"What a tower of strength he would have been to me," he thought, "with his strong brains and steady purpose. I wonder how long this severance of our friendship is to last. What an odd notion that was of his to keep me as far away from his home as possible? I wonder if Anna has yet given him a final answer? I think, had I been in his place, I would have given up the pursuit long ago—it savours too much of persecution to follow up a girl in that way when she shows so

manifestly she has no other feeling than friendliness towards him."

And from Max to Anna, and from Anna to Max his thoughts would go on, and then a quick, sharp feeling of pain would come, and he could feel once more her large, dark, sorrowful eyes fixed upon him, could hear the ringing scorn in her voice as she accused him of being "true to his false-hearted love," could see again the farewell look which had haunted him for so many days and nights—waking and sleeping—a look of reproach and grief, of resolution and pain gathered into one.

"What a true, strong nature hers is," his thoughts went on, "strong, for good or for evil. Full of faults, any one can see them, they lie all on the surface. Head-

strong, self-willed perhaps, passionate in grief or love, and will have a hard battle to fight before she has mastered her own self. Yet what a pure, true, earnest self it will be when once she has it well in hand—but no! he would not idealize again: her, at least, he would look upon with clear, undazzled eyes. She was sweet and true, that was all, with many faults—faults which grew out of the very strength and redundancy of her nature, and which, no doubt, would develop into real heroism and courage with culture and training!"

Then he began to wonder how things would have turned out if Anna had come to him after his brief glimpse of Victoria Oldfield in her new relations of life instead of before, whether he would have had strength, simply,

and without wavering, to have kept his promise to his friend; or how he would act were a similar temptation set before him now. But there—where was the use of dwelling on such fancies, and he resolutely shut out from him mind a very pleasant picture. The thing was done now beyond recall; Anna could never be aught to him but a dear sister and friend, whom he would ever love as truly as he would have loved little Archie, had he lived—for in his fancy Archie and Anna still seemed somehow linked hand in hand. No doubt by this time she had forgiven him for his stubborn coldness and want of courtesy to her—forgotten, perhaps, that little episode at Gravelotte, and had given her heart to faithful Max.

Then the white, sorrowful face rose up be-

fore him once more, and the large, tender eyes looked out their reproach. Was this possible? Could she so forget, could she so hand over her love to another man? And, from the very depths of his soul, the answer came back—No! a thousand times. No. Anna may be headstrong, Anna may be self-willed, but true and steadfast she must ever be, and love with her can have but one meaning, infinite passion, fidelity and devotion, even unto death itself.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ON his way back to Spa, Llewellyn began to form wonderful plans for the future, and even to reduce them to something of definiteness and precision. There should be no more idle day dreams; life henceforth should mean for him real hard work. Action and movement had become a positive necessity to him now, insomuch as he had found it to be the only effectual remedy for jarring irritable nerves, or weak, useless, enervating regrets. A remedy he would adopt with thankfulness, not as before from

some wild, unreasoning impulse or instinct to drown thought and deaden pain, but as a course of treatment to be carried out day by day unwaveringly, with strength of will and purpose until the cure were complete, and he were restored to perfect health once more.

Then he began to turn over in his own mind what art or profession he could best give his thoughts to, and in which he would stand the greatest chance of success.

And here a whole mountain of difficulty arose.

Llewellyn March, with his artistic instincts, perceptions and powers, had never suffered himself to be enchained by any one branch of art to the exclusion of another. Each was so perfect in itself, so absolutely divine, that in turn he had worshipped at each shrine

with far more than the average amount of ardour, and had attained far more than the average amount of success. "I could give my life to painting or sculpture, music or poetry, that is if I had four lives, I could give one to each," he thought. "But how yield my poor little remnant of days exclusively into the hands of one divinity, when all are equally lovely, and worthy to be honoured. If I commence writing a poem I am sure to end by setting it to music; if I make ever so slight a sketch for a bas-relief or statuette, I am as likely as not to fill in the outline, and add the accessories of a picture."

That fatal habit of "seeing all round a subject," as Elliott had called it, was strong upon him now, and, to a certain extent,

paralysed his will and power of action, rendering him inactive and irresolute.

"I wonder," so his thoughts went on, "if it is really better for a man to follow the lead of his own inclinations in the choice of his work in life, or whether it is not wiser to run exactly counter to them, thus bringing into force and play faculties that would otherwise have lain dormant and useless in his being. I, for example, might possibly mount on the wings of my own tastes to a far higher pinnacle among the arts than I should among the sciences or professions, but the question is, should I not be in reality a much smaller and less perfect man with such success than without it? Would not one half my nature be left lying uncultured, fallow and barren? My art instincts will be sure, under any cir-

cumstances, to blossom and flourish, and may be safely left to take care of themselves for a time, but wouldn't a course of good, hard, dry reading and study be of immense service to me in cultivating my thinking and reasoning faculties which, I must confess, are somewhat dwarfed and stunted?"

Then he broke off suddenly, almost smiling at his own fancies and conceits. "If Max were here," he thought, "one of his shrewd, common-sense remarks would scatter all my nonsense at once to the four winds of Heaven. I can fancy I hear him saying, 'where's the use wasting time in thinking what is best for a man to do; let him find out what he can do the best, and do it.' The simple truth is, after all my years of study and art-worship, I am fit for nothing through my irresolution

and want of purpose. I couldn't go in for the Church, for I should not know which party or sect to join. It would be an utter impossibility for me to dot down my religious belief into 39 articles, or into 139 for the matter of that, and no clergyman, I am convinced, would let me enter his pulpit a second time. It would be useless attempting to read Law, for, even supposing I were ever fortunate enough to get a brief, I should be as likely as not, in full court, to turn round and plead the cause of my adversary instead of my client's. A soldier's life I am utterly unsuited for; I would far sooner go in for the art of healing than for that of blood-shedding—ah!—what a splendid idea if I could have studied medicine, with old Max for a teacher!"

Thus he reasoned and argued with himself, broke off, and began again. This last was a very pleasant thought, and he lingered over it lovingly, but common sense told him it was vain and visionary. He and Max Trego must be content to be apart for many a long year to come perhaps, so he dismissed this bright little dream from his thoughts, and fell to wondering, and vexing, and perplexing himself once more with questionings and doubts as to the suitability of this or that art or science to his qualifications and intellect, or the suitability of his qualifications and intellect to this or that art or science.

It was not until he had reached Spa, and was walking through the quiet by-streets with a sky all peacock-green and opal tints

overhead, and with sweet evening sounds coming from the woods beyond, that his mind was made up.

Yes, he would give himself back to Art, at length he resolved, and something of his old fire and energy came back to him, and he burned with desire to enrol himself once more as a pupil under the Divine teacher. Art henceforth should be to him mother, mistress and friend; there should be no more turning nor swerving from this purpose. A syren, with sweet silvery tones, had lured him to forsake the steep rugged paths for low-lying pastures and pleasant shaded groves, but the syren's voice was stilled now, could never sound for him again. Up the mountain paths, higher and higher, he would climb, his

feet growing stronger, his sight truer, his brain clearer, till he gained the very pinnacle which pierced the heavens itself.

Then he recollected some old friends he had in Florence, sculptors who had attained some little celebrity in their art, and he determined to seek them out once more, and beg to be again received into their coterie to study and work with them as in the days of old.

"Yes, he would start, without further delay, for Florence, and endeavour in some measure to redeem his wasted years. True, he had lost that faith in his own powers and genius which had at one time led him to believe he could when, and as he pleased, achieve success and fame, but without that faith even, he felt he might yet, with time and

patience and real hard work, do something worthy perhaps to be handed down to future generations, something that would bear to the men who were to come, a message of beauty, and thought, and travail, and a life lived with a purpose." And his eyes sparkled, his face flushed, and his footsteps rang out sharp and firm over the roughly-paved footway, at the thought of a definite aim before him once more, and a real work in life to be done.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A WAITER met him at the door of his hotel, and handed him a letter. It was a very brief one from Newton, containing a money enclosure, and a few lines trusting Mr. March was well, nothing more. Llewellyn read it through with a vague feeling that something was omitted or suppressed in the letter. "Why do they, none of them, mention her name to me," he thought. (*Her* had grown to mean Anna now.) "They might know how anxious I am for news of her, even though I haven't said it in so many

words." He turned the letter over once more to see if there were a postscript anywhere. No, not another word, and he replaced it in the envelope with a feeling of annoyance and discontent quite new to him.

It was astonishing how Newton's enclosures always seemed to come at the very right moment, and it was also astonishing, considering the smallness of the fortune Llewellyn's mother had left him that it should yield so large an income.

Llewellyn had mentioned this in one of his home letters, rather doubtful whether his old friend were not imposing upon his ignorance in such matters, and sending him a larger allowance than he had any right to draw.

Newton's answer came back, very well put together.

"Mr. March had forgotten apparently that during Sir Geoffrey Colet's lifetime he had not once received the dividends on this property. They had consequently accumulated in his hands, and he had ventured, on his own responsibility, to invest them at a fair amount of interest, and this interest he had now much pleasure in paying over to Mr. March."

And Llewellyn was compelled to accept this explanation, although still not altogether satisfied in his own mind.

Certain it was that Llewellyn March had not hitherto felt the inconveniences which arise from a slender purse, and it is possible that, in spite of the refinement and luxury in which he had been reared, that with his simple tastes and his few requirements, the

loss of fortune might press less heavily upon him than it would upon many in a lower sphere of life. His greatest extravagances had ever been perpetrated in the service of art and science; but now that he realised that all such extravagances were entirely beyond his reach, he put them away from him without effort or repining, and could sit down and write his letters as contentedly in a cottage, at a deal table, as he used at one time at his wondrously carved and curiously inlaid escritoire at Castle Mount.

It was a still, hot evening; the sun was setting in a perfect blaze of scarlet and gold, and not a breath stirred the jasmine-scented air.

Llewellyn lingered for few moments in the piazza which skirted the front of the house, draped with all sorts of pretty creeping

plants, and shaded with large oleanders, now in the fullness of their pink blossoms.

Some gaily-dressed ladies were crossing the *place* towards the Rédoute, and the townswomen, in groups of twos and threes, stood gossiping at the fountain, at the corner of the street.

There was a ball at the Rédoute, and the notes of the first valse floated to him on the still air through the half-opened windows of the *salle*.

The ladies, with the bright hoods and opera cloaks, quickened their pace; a few of their cavaliers came sauntering forth from *the* rooms, *par excellence*, to meet and escort them—men of all nations and tongues—swarthy Spaniards, diamond-ringed Jews, and dandy Russian princes.

Some tired children, in embroidered Parisian tunics, and with hands filled with field flowers were slowly returning homewards with their *bonnes*, or governesses; two sisters of charity in coarsest black and white, were going from house to house collecting scraps into a huge basket, and a distant murmur of evening notes from blackbird and throstle and linnet came from the deepening shadows of the woods beyond.

What a medley! What a confusion of sight and sound and idea in it all! What a rush and whirl of thoughts and recollections came sweeping down upon him as he looked and listened.

Sometimes the blackbirds and throstles had the best of it, and brought back to him, with their sweet low notes, very pleasant

home pictures of tangled English woodland and lonely rippling streams.

Anon, a wave of valse melody would rise high above the rest and carry him along in its perfect measure, among lovely fairy-like forms in a flower-scented banqueting hall, bright with wax-lights and mirrors, and glistening silk hangings.

He can feel with a sudden thrill the gaze of the tender eyes, which looked up into his that night, the faint rich odour of the crushed carnations which she wore steals over him again, and her soft gloved hand once more lightly rests on his shoulder.

The scene changes, and a grand old Castle rises up before him, towering high above grey granite rocks, and a silent, moonlit sea. Somewhere, on a rough, uneven mound,

among the dark firs and pines, stand the blackened, ruined walls of what was a mighty fortress in the days of old, and there, he, Llewellyn March, with a white-robed dainty young beauty by his side, listens once more to the voice of love and happiness.

He can hear even the rush and song of the waves, the soughing of the soft wind among the pines, so completely are his senses enthralled. His own words of adoration and praise for God's world of beauty come back to his memory, and her low sweet murmur of acquiescence.

Why did it all come before him thus with such force and vividness? Could it be the blackbird's song, or the light, graceful notes of the valse which had conjured up this vision to his fancy?

Oh, the fleetness, the unreality, of those bright, happy, golden hours! Why did they rise up before him thus in this hot, still autumn twilight?

He was commencing a new life. He had set before himself a new purpose. Was he never to shake off these trammels of the past? Would these spectres and shadows at every turn and bend of his pathway thus re-appear to mock him and point their finger of scorn at his faith in the perfect God and His perfect laws; a faith which could meet with no realisation in a world where every joy was winged, and where the very ground out of which grew the wheat and the corn, the daisies and the roses, was formed by strata upon strata of the dust of dead human

hearts, and the clay of forgotten graveyards.

"Not so," said Llewellyn, reverently and aloud, "it is realised to the full, even in the miserable stunted life I have led. Sorrow and faithlessness, pain and bloodshedding, cannot stamp it out nor even shake it; for beneath all this misery and agony, running through this web of complication as a golden thread, I can trace the Divine perfect law from which these things emanate as a natural consequence. All perfect, all beautiful, because all in order, all absolutely right, God's world will ever be to me."

A sound and hum of voices broke in upon his thoughts and a noise of door-shutting came to him across the wide, stone-paved hall.

One of Sir Charles Oldfield's servants ran past in great haste, evidently despatched on some message, and from one of the salons he could hear the quick, sharp tones of a woman's voice, and the low peevish quaver of the Baronet, in reply.

One of the hotel waiters came out of an adjoining room.

"What is it—what has happened?" Llewellyn asked.

Then the man told him how that Sir Charles Oldfield's tiny boy, after having gone from one fit of convulsions into another all the day long, had just sobbed out its little life, and now lay white and motionless in its mother's arms.

While they were speaking, Miss Oldfield

opened the door of the room whence the voices came, evidently looking for the man who had just been despatched on a message. Her face was swollen with tears, and she looked flushed and angry.

Llewellyn fancied there was a mute appeal for help in her eyes, as they rested on him where he stood by the door.

"Can I be of any service, Miss Oldfield?" he asked, as he advanced towards her, lifting his hat.

"I think, perhaps, you might," replied Miriam, "if you could manage to take Sir Charles off our hands in some way for an hour or so, it would be a great kindness. You see, he took scarcely any notice of the little baby while it lived, but now that it is

dead, he sits there scolding incessantly, because he says Lady Victoria brought his boy here to die."

Llewellyn went into the chamber of death.

Coming in from the fresh sweet air, the room felt hot and stifling, the jalousies, too, were closed, and for a few moments all was haze and dimness to him.

Then as he grew accustomed to the gloom of the room, he could distinguish Sir Charles half reclining in a capacious easy-chair, and Victoria in the farthest darkest corner, almost as white and still as the little waxen form she held so reverently in her arms.

She made no sign, she took no notice of his low bow, for even Llewellyn March, and her love, and regrets, and remorse, sank into

nothingness, before the great sorrow which overwhelmed her now.

Thus they met once more : she with her dead boy pressed to her bosom—dead hopes, dead joys, dead love.

CHAPTER XXV.

SIR CHARLES stopped his querulous complaining, as Llewellyn entered the room, and looked up surprised and doubtful, scarcely indeed recognising his old acquaintance under the transformation which illness and sorrow had wrought in him.

"This is a curious situation," thinks Llewellyn, himself rather doubtful as to what reception the Baronet will give him, "here am I actually offering my hand in friendship to a man for whom I should have imagined at one time a bullet too good an ending.

And here am I standing in the same room with the woman I worshipped so madly not many months since, whose half-smiles made the very sunshine of my life, and not the faintest thrill nor shadow of love in my heart for her, only deepest, truest pity and sorrow for her griefs and mistakes."

Sir Charles took his proffered hand mechanically, scarcely pleased at this sudden intrusion of an old lover of his wife's, but nevertheless for the moment diverted from his egotism and fault-finding.

"Come into the verandah, Sir Charles," said Llewellyn, "I will help you along; a breath of fresh air will do you good."

"My throat!" began the Baronet, "I suffer from oppression at the chest, Mr. March, and dare not face the night air."

"This room will stifle you; no wonder you feel oppressed," pursued Llewellyn. "There is a cool little room on the other side of the hall. I want," he added, remembering Sir Charles's peculiarities of old, "to talk to you about a new arrival here, a German doctor, great on matters of diet, and who has already made some wonderful cures in the place."

Sir Charles rose as promptly as his confirmed ailments admitted, and with Llewellyn's aid limped out of the room, Llewellyn bowing low to Victoria once more.

As for Victoria, grief stricken and motionless, she made no sign that she was even conscious of his presence in the room, she only clasped her dead boy more closely in her arms, looking down on him with hungering tearless eyes. It was all that was left her

now of love and happiness, and that too must soon be buried away out of her sight, and God help her then!

"Have the windows closed, Mr. March, please. Kindly send for George and my wraps," said Sir Charles, ensconcing himself in the most comfortable arm-chair he could find in the room.

"A mollusc and nothing more," thinks Llewellyn, as he watched the process of wrapping up and encasing which George quickly accomplished with mantle and eider-downs, leaving only a small portion of Sir Charles's head visible. "A mollusc, scarcely even a cephalopod. And she could give herself to such an one as he!"

Oh, the blindness of a man's heart, when all love has died out of it, and he has no light

whereby to read another's soul! Was it not easier for Victoria to "give herself to such an one as he," who bore no affinity to the only one she had in real truth ever loved, who offering her so little, had no right to claim much from her in return; than to one, who might in reason claim much at her hands by right of an honest love and faith? What, indeed, had she to do with love and faith, which in the long years to come, would only rise up and mock her as the shadow of that she had so ruthlessly trampled under foot in the mud and mire of her own worldliness and selfishness?

A wearisome three-quarters of an hour passed in converse with Sir Charles on his numerous maladies, Llewellyn not attempting

to stem nor turn the tide of talk into another channel, very well content to offer this small service on the shrine of his old love, even though no fire should come down from heaven to consume the sacrifice.

At length Miriam entered the room, followed by George; she first carefully deposited two tracts in prominent positions—one on the top of the clock on the mantelpiece, another on the music-stand of the open piano—then while George was assisting Sir Charles out of his chair, thanked Llewellyn for relieving her for so long from the charge of her father.

"You see," she explained, "I could do nothing with Lady Victoria, while my father was so troublesome, now, thanks to you, I

have been able to persuade her to have some tea and lie down, while the nurses see to the poor little baby."

"I think, Miss Oldfield," said Llewellyn, speaking so as not to be heard by the Baronet, whom George was assisting out of the room, "I think Sir Charles is really very ill, far worse than you imagine, and I would strongly urge upon you to return to England as soon as possible!"

"Yes, I dare say he is ill," replied Miriam, "and he is also very tiresome. If he gave his thoughts to higher things, his little ailments wouldn't trouble him so much." Then she said good-night, and went away.

And Llewellyn, left alone once more, thankfully made his escape into the quiet night, walking rapidly until he had got clear of the

town and felt the fresh soft wind blowing in his face from across the breezy downs.

"Poor, poor Victoria," he thought, "your best, purest joy snatched away from you now, where will you turn for refuge and shelter!"

A sweet scent of clover and wild thyme came from the sun-dried dewy grass under his feet, and the tiny star-lamps began to twinkle and burn in the clear blue dome overhead.

And somehow the image of Victoria faded from his thoughts, and he began to wonder if little Anna, far away on the lonely Cornish coast, were gazing up into the same glorious expanse of blue, with its flecks and spangles of gold!

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE old river-side house shone out in all the glory of its autumn colouring, the Virginian creeper had changed to coral and gold, and hung in graceful chains from roof to balcony, from balcony to portico, and Anna, with steadfast face, and in quietest tones, had told Max she was ready to go to Castle Mount.

He had remonstrated with her, for there was a look in her eyes he did not like.

"Anna," he had said, "I am resolved that you shall not be urged to leave your old

home against your will. Put off going till next spring, you will be stronger then, and better able to face strangers."

Anna, however, was resolved also. "No, Max," she had replied, "I cannot put it away from me; it has to be done, and I will ask no further delay." And Max, knowing from experience how useless it was to contend with Anna when once her mind was made up, was compelled to give way, and, strong man though he was, with at times an iron will of his own, to bend before this slight girl's stubbornness and resolution.

So Anna, with Mrs. Trego for companion and chaperone, had started for Castle Mount one bright, glowing, August morning, leaving Max alone with his books and his "cases," and his fever-stricken patients, for his occu-

pation and recreation; and two ancient servants with a small lad, the ticking clocks, a huge purring cat, and some chirping crickets as the sole representatives of life and society in the house.

Perhaps, after all, Max was the one who had had the hardest battle to fight, a battle—not short and sharp, but wearying and prolonged — between blind misguiding passion and simple, straightforward duty. Bravely and well had he done his part, winning the day by sheer courage and obstinacy, going through, hour by hour, a very martyrdom of vexation and annoyance, of bitterest jealousy and disappointment — in fact, of a very whirlwind and confusion of all the passions commingled—sooner than give the slightest pain to the girl he loved so truly, and who was

ever by his side looking upon his struggles and his sufferings with calm, unconscious, unobservant eye.

And this, perhaps, was the hardest of all to bear.

He had said to his mother, and had meant what he had said, that "no woman living should ruin his life, nor even alter its course," yet none the less was it a sore trial to him to watch this girl, whom he had hoped at one time, by long and patient waiting to win, pouring out her love in all its lavishness upon his nearest friend, and offering to him only the commonest kindnesses of daily life, and the most ordinary affection of a kind-hearted sister. From her earliest years her happiness and well-being had been his one thought and care, and now he had to stand by and see her

lifted so high above himself in rank, and wealth, and station, that no thought, no care of his would be any longer of much service to her; in fact, so high, that he must trample his pride under foot, as he had trampled his love, ere he could stretch forth his hand to proffer such love and care.

To this he had attained, this crushing and trampling down of love and pride in turn he had done bravely and well, but there was a point beyond this which it was reserved for him to reach, a higher sacrifice yet to be made, a nobler deed of self-denial to be done.

And when the time came he was ready and willing to do it.

When he had seen Anna starting for Castle Mount, and had watched the lingering loving farewell look which she had cast upon her

old home, give place to one resolute, set, and hopeless he had said to himself—

"This must end now, there is yet another chance, and that shall be tried!"

He went back to the little narrow study which was henceforth to be to him his temple of worship and palace of delight, and taking up his pen wrote these few short lines to Llewellyn March—

"DEAR MARCH,—

"I have suddenly discovered that I have been behaving like a great selfish brute of late, and that towards one whom we both love very dearly.

"Do you recollect a certain promise you once made to me, not so very long ago, and which hitherto you have faithfully and

honourably kept? From that promise I now release you entirely and absolutely, and beg of you to return to England at once.

"Your faithful friend,

"MAX TREGO."

He read over this letter carefully; should he be more explicit, was it necessary to make it stronger?

"No," he thought, "Llewellyn March with his imaginative powers can easily read between the lines, and can fill in very readily the outline I have sketched. Unless I am very much mistaken, by this time he is heartily sick of his visions and day-dreams, and will be only too glad to exchange them for some substantial reality."

So he posted his letter to Spa, without any

further addition or comment, came back to eat his solitary dinner in the old-fashioned dining-room, then wandered for a brief ten minutes over the somewhat desolate house, pausing for a moment at the door of Anna's little studio.

"Shall I go in," he thought, "and collect some *memento mori* of these dead days?" He opened the door half-way, then closed it abruptly, and went rapidly downstairs to his study.

"We will have no playing at sentiment if you please," he said to himself, somewhat roughly, as he turned up the single jet of gas and arranged his books and papers for a good four or five hours' work. "We will have no playing at sentiment. It is possible I should merely have found some half-dozen sketches

of the angel Gabriel lying about in odd corners, and those had far better remain where they are. Perhaps some day when they have little children playing about their knees old uncle Max may come in for a share of their home life and happiness."

CHAPTER XXVII.

MAX'S letter arrived at Spa about a week after Llewellyn had left the bright little town.

True to his resolution to commence work at once, he had started *en route* for Florence the day after his meeting with the Oldfields, perhaps in his secret heart glad to escape from a place in which old ties and bitter sorrows had been so unexpectedly recalled to him.

He did not like to leave his hotel without enquiring for the Oldfields, and at the same

time did not care to run the risk of a second encounter with Sir Charles and his maladies, nor to be brought face to face again with Victoria in her dumb hopeless misery.

So he sent up some cards enquiring for the ladies, cards which had grown yellow with lying so long undisturbed in one of the recesses of his pocket-book, first carefully drawing his pen through the old Castle Mount address, which still lingered in the left-hand corner.

"I suppose," he thought, looking lovingly at the dear old name, "I shall some time or other have a settled place of abode, but at present it certainly seems rather a far away possibility. I wonder if I shall ever get a glimpse of Castle Mount again? Perhaps some years hence, when Anna is married, and

has her house full of visitors she may ask me down for the hunting. Married! I doubt if she will ever find any one worthy of her sweet true self, even Max—"

But here he broke off abruptly, feeling that if he pursued this train of thought it would lead him into some sort of treachery against his oldest, staunchest friend.

Presently George the butler came in with messages. Lady Victoria was better and calmer, able even to give directions as to the funeral of the little heir, which was to take place at Maddingley. Sir Charles was very weak still, and complaining. Miss Oldfield was well, and would be glad if Mr. March would give her the address of Mr. Everhard's people at Durham, as she wished to write to him there.

"Everhard's Durham address," repeated Llewellyn, wonderingly as he wrote it down as nearly as he could remember it. How strangely his old life was beginning to surge up and around him now! He thought he had severed the old ties once and for aye, and yet here in this far away little town, on the threshold, as it were, of a new life, were the Castle Mount associations once more surrounding him, and the old life creeping up and around him again. He had thought he had done with visions, and phantasies, and shadows, and with all the make believe and unreality of the past, and now here was the past following him up as it were to cast its shadows once more. He would break away from all this twilight-sorrow, and sentiment, and throw himself at once into the

broad daylight of real, hard, persevering study.

"She," he said aloud, thinking only of Victoria, as he had last seen her all-absorbed in her baby's living and dying, "she has evidently had no difficulty in snapping the old ties and bonds of love; why should they linger about me still, to stunt my life, and bar my progress?"

So he thankfully said adieu to the little watering-place, with vague wonderings in his heart what would be the next turn his path in life would take, whether he had in reality taken, as he had purposed, his destiny into his own hands once more, or whether there were not mingled with its web and woof so many destinies, so many threads, that a higher hand, working from a pattern and

with a purpose, were not reducing its broken lines and mazy intricacies into form and beauty.

It was now nearly ten years since he had last lodged and studied in Florence, and the place looked strangely familiar, and yet unfamiliar to him. Ten years mean a good many circuits of the hands round the clock, a fair number of changeful seasons, and a multitude of heart-throbs. At certain periods of a man's life, too, the heart throbs faster, and life flows more swiftly than it does at others, and Llewellyn when he began to enquire for his friends, found with some little difficulty that one and all had drifted away on the tide of time and fortune to other quarters of the globe. One had set up his studio in Rome, under noble patronage,

another had gone to the very heart of London to win fame and gold, a third had married a rich widow, and had bought a modern palace at Siena, giving up art at the shrine of luxury, and a fourth was dead.

These were indeed checks and chills to greet him on the very verge of his new life! It took some little time to find out all this, and meanwhile he wandered about the gleaming, lustrous city, with its music, and pictures, and marbles, and palaces, somewhat lonely and disappointed.

"It is as though every one and everything had combined together to throw me back upon my old ties and associations, as though I were encompassed and entangled in a web from which I could not extricate myself," he said, trying in vain to get the old measure of

enjoyment out of the lovely sights of nature and art by which he was surrounded. But it was useless. Even the burning blue of the sky seemed to have lost its depth and lustre, and the hills were less brilliant in their browns, and yellows and greens.

It was not until he had been about a week at Florence that he recollected that none of his friends in England had any idea that he had left Spa, and it was just possible there might be letters waiting for him there. So he wrote a few lines to Newton, giving him his address at Florence, and a brief note to the Spa Post-office, requesting to have his letters forwarded to him at once.

In due course they came—one from Arnold Von Durlach, dilating on his newly-found wedded happiness, and bidding him, in

lengthy sentences and sonorous periods, to "go and do likewise;" and another from Max, which he read through hurriedly at first, scarcely taking in the full import of the words, and again with leaping heart and a wild rush of joy as his senses awakened slowly to the real meaning of Max's hints, and his entreaty to return "at once."

"At once!" echoed Llewellyn, drawing a full breath, as all sorts of imaginings, conjectures and hopes rushed through his brain; "who would delay an instant with such a joy as this held out to him?" and he commenced throwing rapidly in a heap on the floor all his few possessions and encumbrances preparatory to packing. Then he paused in dismay, looking down on the date of the letter. More than a fortnight old! What

might not happen in a fortnight's time! Something must have occurred to induce Max to write thus urgently, some terror must have been before his eyes which outweighed to his mind the surrender of his best hopes and life's longings. Some danger must be threatening Anna which he could only see one way of averting—and Llewellyn's pulse beats fast and strong—and here was all this time lost—a whole fortnight's delay through his own thoughtless carelessness.

"My darling!" he cried aloud, stretching out his arms as though to clasp her there, "the little one who, all unknown to myself, has crept into my heart, the true one to whom I could yield no trust, and whose beauty I could not see for the glitter of the false light which blinded my eyes! May God watch

and shadow you now with His infinite love and tenderness.

Hasten, Llewellyn March, lose not one moment now, for days are numbered and moments are precious. Speed on your way with the wings of the wind, and God grant you may not arrive too late!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

IT was towards the close of a brilliant, cloudless afternoon, the air all heavy with sweet autumn scents, and the fields ablaze with yellow corn and scarlet poppies, that Anna and Mrs. Trego arrived at Castle Mount. They had rested a night at Exeter on their way down, Mrs. Trego fearful of testing Anna's strength too much by a long, unbroken journey.

At St. Caradoc, the nearest post-town to Castle Mount, and distant from it about thirty-five miles, they were met by Newton

with the Castle carriage, and a superb pair of greys, and thence they journeyed slowly and leisurely towards Castle Mount, Newton with difficulty restraining his enthusiasm, and suppressing his delight that his prayers were at length answered, and the grand old place would once more own a ruler—a ruler, too, who had a right to reign there supreme.

Grand, indeed, it looked in the glowing, August sunlight, as Anna and Mrs. Trego drove up to the wide-flung back iron gates. The last five or six miles of their drive had led them along the coast-line, with the fresh, salt breeze blowing in their faces, and in their ears the sound of the "wild water lapping the crags." Anna, who throughout their long journey had been silent and thoughtful, now awoke to sudden interest and animation. She

was too much of an artist not to appreciate the wildness and grandeur of the Cornish landscape which lay stretched on either side, and, with wide-opened eyes and head thrown back, she drank in the beauties of the scene around her.

The miles of golden, waving corn fields through which they had passed, had been succeeded by wide-stretching moors patched with heather and gorse, and bordered with grim cloud-crowned hills. Thence down steep, winding lanes, cut out of the very rocks, rich in velvet mosses and trembling ferns, and all sorts of beautiful tangled grasses. On and on they went, winding up and down with the windings and turnings of the road, the leafy walls on either side rising higher and higher, until at last the splashing

and dashing of the waves and the crying of the sea-gull sounded loud above the twittering and murmuring of the insect world in the banks and hollows, and, towering high on the dark, forlorn headland upon which it is built, Castle Mount rose upon their view, with its gardens, and lawns, and woodlands stretching out to the very edge of the cliffs.

"It is glorious, it is wondrous!" exclaimed Anna, with a flush of admiration and joy mounting to her pale face. Then her head drooped, and, covering her eyes with both hands, she shut out the magnificent panorama from her sight. "And he," she said, in low tones, "had to give up all this for me!"

Max had expressly stipulated that there was to be no demonstration of any sort on Anna's arrival at Castle Mount.

"It will not be seemly," he had written to Newton, "considering the distressing circumstances under which both her parents have died, and, besides this, she is not yet strong enough to undergo the fatigue of such a thing."

So Newton had been obliged to lay aside his projects of triumphal arches, bell ringing and bonfire blazing, in which his soul would have delighted, and content himself with restoring the household in all details to exactly the footing it was on previously to Sir Geoffrey's death. A work of time, indeed, this, but an intense labour of love to the faithful old man.

Mrs. Trego had felt from the first, she was undertaking no slight responsibility in thus acting as sole chaperone and guardian to

Anna at a very critical period of her life. Although she had brought up this young girl from her earliest infancy, and trained and educated her through her riper years, at times she felt there were hidden depths in Anna's nature she could never fathom, doors closed and firmly locked, of which she would never possess the key. Much as she had at one time desired a marriage between Anna and her only son, she had wisely surrendered her project now, and rejoiced that she had done so, as every day brought fresh proof to her that, although there might be plenty of affection between Anna and herself, of sympathy, in its deepest, truest sense, there was none.

"She is not one of us; Max will be far happier, I hope, one day, married to some

girl of more ordinary type, although her nose should not be quite so straight, nor her eyes so large, as Anna's." This she thought as she watched Anna, with the air almost of a princess of the blood royal, walking the length of the Castle hall, accepting with grace and dignity the homage and acknowledgments offered to her; giving her orders where they were needed, slowly but unhesitatingly, and in no sense embarrassed by the wealth and luxury with which she so suddenly found herself surrounded. She had taken no extra pains with her dress or personal appearance, her plain mourning robe and black hat were simple in the extreme, yet as she moved slowly along she looked so thoroughly in keeping with her surroundings that Mrs. Trego said, softly and sadly to

herself, "with us she was but as a stranger and sojourner; here she is in her own place, the place she was destined from the first to fill."

Over the wide fire-place of the hall, with its high carved marble mantel-piece, there hung three life-sized portraits, Sir Geoffrey and his two nephews, Archibald and Llewellyn.

Llewellyn's was the first that met Anna's eyes, and in his fair, boyish features she could trace the same frank, tender look which had charmed and won her heart in the old childish days, the same joyous brightness looked out of the large blue eyes, the same sweet smile played about the almost-girlish mouth. "Welcome, little Anna," she could almost fancy she heard him say. "Welcome here; you have done the right thing at last."

From his face her eyes wandered to her father's. This was the first portrait she had ever seen of Sir Geoffrey, and as she looked, a great wave of bitterness surged up in her heart. He wore the old-fashioned dress he had retained to the last day of his life. His features, too, were fair and straight, his forehead wide and high, and his eyes large, and blue, and tender.

Anna looked up at him steadfastly. This, then, was the man who had loved his wife and child so well that he had left the first to fret and grieve in her island loneliness, with the consolation of a few hundred sovereigns yearly and the assurance of his constant care, and on the second he had not bestowed one single thought for eighteen years! When at length at the eleventh hour, and with the

hand of death upon him, the thought of his child had entered his mind, he had made a feeble effort to right her by wronging one who had, at least, equal claim with her.

"Those fair, smooth features must lie," she said to herself, passionately, "or else the painter must have lied when he gave them to him." Then she checked herself. "At least he was my father," she thought, with a sigh, "and those eyes are Llewellyn's own." Then a sudden sharp pain struck her. "My mother cursed him with a bitter curse. What if that curse descend with the inheritance to her own child!"

Mrs. Trego, at Anna's side, watched her with attentive eyes as she stood still and silent beneath her father's portrait. Her face seemed for the moment transfigured

almost with some new wondrous light shining out and about it. What was this strange, sudden likeness flashing out of the girl's pale face with its wave of black hair? What was it—whence came it? Mrs. Trego glanced up once more to Sir Geoffrey's portrait. No, the resemblance did not lie there—was not reflected in those fair, haughty features. Then her gaze fell upon little Archie's sunshiny face, on the farther side—little Archie, radiant and dimpled, with a curly retriever at his feet, and a riding-whip in his hand.

Anna turned abruptly from the picture; then the far-away likeness faded into the dead canvas, or the living girl's face, Mrs. Trego knew not which.

The housekeeper drew back a heavy curtain from one of the Gothic windows.

"This was where Mr. Archie met with his death, madam," she said, pointing out the pretty Italian garden with its terraces and stone vases, fountains and statues, and the blue lake lying silent in the midst.

Anna gazed at it with a puzzled, enquiring look.

Then she passed her hand slowly over her forehead. What was this dim, shadow-like feeling creeping over her, and clinging about her like the mists on a mountain side, lifting ever and again, and showing the bright distant heavens beyond, and anon enwrapping landscape, and mountain, heavens and earth in its damp, uncertain folds?

"I think I am tired," she said, turning to Mrs. Trego. "My head is not clear to-night; I will go at once to my own room." She

gave one upward farewell look at the portraits, but the shades of twilight had fallen, the wide hall looked drear and chill, solemn almost as the aisle of a church, and out of its shadowy gloom Llewellyn's face looked down upon her grey and worn, as she had last seen it at Gravelotte. The morning's glow had faded from the canvas, and she could fancy that his lips moved to the words, "'when the tree is thrown down, any one may gather the wood.' Gather at your will, little Anna, gather at your will." Anna turned away, and went silently to her own room.

They had prepared for her the largest and most stately room in the house, which had been occupied in succession by the reigning Colets for many generations.

"Will you not like a smaller and more comfortable room, Anna?" asked Mrs. Trego, glancing almost nervously at the long, sweeping hangings of silk and brocade which hung from the windows and bed, the delicate cob-web lace of the toilet tables, and Venetian glass mirrors which decorated the walls.

"Oh, no!" replied Anna. "This is exactly the sort of room I like. Life might be very pleasant amid such surroundings, if only—"

Then she paused abruptly.

"If only." Two of the saddest words in our English tongue, when thus linked together. As a very wail it rises up to Heaven, wrung out of the anguish and torture of thousands of human hearts, vibrating and echoing like some mournful dirge beneath the

ebbing, struggling wave of human life, as it beats out its strength and beauty against the iron rocks of circumstance, fortune or death!

And Anna Colet, young, beautiful, with boundless wealth at command, sighs forth wearily her "if only."

CHAPTER XXIX.

ANNA'S first day at Castle Mount was busy in the extreme. Mrs. Trego had begged of her to take things quietly, not to over-fatigue herself, and little by little to accomplish all she wished to have done.

Anna, as usual, was resolute, if quiet. "I want," she said, addressing Newton, "to go over the Castle and grounds to-day, but, first of all, will you please show me the place where my father and mother are buried."

So Newton led the way to a quiet, shaded

garden, separated from the first flower garden by a row of aspens and silver birch; not sombre with cypress, or yew, or pine, but planted and shaded with all sorts of white flowering shrubs and trees, and now in the golden autumn odorous with the scent of jasmine and honeysuckle. In the midst of all this fragrance and beauty stood the plain white marble mausoleum Sir Geoffrey had caused to be erected on little Archie's death, and where, within so short a time of each other, he and Lady Colet had been buried.

Anna leaned her cheek against the cold marble of the tomb, and the hot, blinding tears rained from her eyes.

"If only"—rose to her lips once more.

O, regret! regret!—how often is this

tribute laid upon the grave of the dear ones dead!

"Is it not perfect as a resting-place, Miss Colet?" asked Newton, after a brief pause, scarcely liking to disturb the sacredness of her grief.

"Yes," she said, "it is perfect, and I thank you most gratefully for your care and reverence for my parents' grave." Bitterness and reproach died out of her heart, only regret and deepest pity remained for those two lives so blighted and marred.

"But they are at rest now, thank God for that," she thought, as she stooped to gather up some of the white petals which lay scattered on the steps of the mausoleum.

Llewellyn March would have told her that they were living out their own lives somewhere

else, commencing from the very point at which they had laid them down, but Anna Colet, sick at heart, and wearied and faint with the heaviness of the burthens laid upon her, could only think of the after-death as peace and rest.

After a time they continued their walk through the shrubberies and park. Anna paused before a sudden break in the park thicket which let in a glimpse of greenest pasture land, contrasting well with a field of golden corn, and showing through a distant break in the branches of the big trees beyond, a brown-patched, heather-crowned hill.

Newton mistook her meaning. "Ah, Miss Colet," he began, apologetically, "I know it ought to have been planted and mended long ago, but I haven't had the heart to have it

done. Mr. Llewellyn, when a boy of fourteen, made that gap in the thicket, to get a good jump for his hunter. Many and many a time have I watched him clear it in grand style—you will see there is a good wide ditch on one side—he used to call it taking a short cut home, and often and often have I thought the young gentleman was taking a short cut to Paradise at the same time."

"On no account have it mended, Newton," said Anna, decidedly. "I wish everything to remain as nearly as possible in the same condition in which it was in Mr. March's time. Indeed, I wish no change of any sort to be made, but everything, as far as possible, to be restored to exactly the old footing. I wish you to have it known in the household that I would like things to go on

as though Mr. March were expected home daily."

She broke off abruptly.

"What about the stables," she added, as though struck by a sudden thought. "Mr. March used, I know, to take a great interest in the horses, from what Dr. Trego has told me."

Newton shook his head.

"I fear the stables have not been doing so well as they might of late," he replied. "Mr. March certainly took great interest in the horses, and kept every one up to the mark, although he used to quarrel a good deal with old Redfern about the physic he was always dosing them with. Redfern, however, did his work well, and the horses throve; but I am sorry to say he took offence a little while ago, and threw up his post."

"Oh, couldn't he be induced to return?" asked Anna, dolefully.

"I have no doubt he would return if he were told you were here, and things were to be as they were in Sir Geoffrey's time. You see, Miss Colet, when I was left here in sole charge, I took upon myself the responsibility of reducing the establishment and cutting down the stable expenditure by discharging some of his staff. He took offence at this and sent in his resignation, and I am obliged to admit that things have not gone on so well since."

"Get him back, by all means, Newton, and let him have his old staff and expenditure," urged Anna, "and everything else that has been changed or in any way swerved from the old routine, I should wish restored in like manner."

They had wandered some distance through the park while talking; wandered and returned, for, following the curve of the dark fir grove, it had brought them to the side of the park which overhung the beach, and walking to the very edge of the cliff, Anna, looked down from the giddy height.

For a moment she forgot her pain and weariness, forgot even Llewellyn March and his sorrows and sufferings, and stood silent and awe-stricken by the magnificent beauty of the sea picture spread before her.

The tide was low, and the white, glistening sands sparkled and burned under the cloudless blue sky; tiny flecks of white foam leapt and played in and out the sparkling, rippling ocean, and crags, and headland, and

huge granite boulders stood out in bold, brown relief against its sunlit glory.

So vast, so sublime, speaking in the same eternal voice wherewith it had spoken through all generations past, wherewith it would speak through all generations to come!

And she had thought her world of woe illimitable, and her fleeting pain and grief eternal!

Roll on thou great bronze everlasting ocean! Roll on and speak to tried, suffering souls through all the ages, of the littleness and fleetness of the burdens which so weigh them down, and of the vastness and strength of the hand which holds them, as it were, in its very hollow!

"If only"—the sound had never died out of her ears!

A great struggle was going on in Anna's heart at that moment, of which Newton, standing by her side, knew nothing. A struggle of endurance, patience, submission against a worn-out spirit and a passionate love.

Newton, watching her face closely, saw it grow deadly pale, and she shivered in the hot August sun as though struck with ague.

"Does the sea ever come up to the base of these cliffs, Newton?" at length she asked, in low, uncertain tones, as though afraid of herself and her own voice.

"At high tide, always," replied Newton. "And on stormy winter nights it roars and dashes over them till one begins to think it will swallow them up altogether. See how it has been at work at this corner," and he

led the way to the broken edge of the rock, whence they could look down into a narrow gorge, formed by the encroachments of the sea, and which led between the jutting crags straight down to the shining white sands.

"At high tide," he went on, "the sea whirls and washes at pleasure up this tiny channel."

Anna shuddered and turned away.

CHAPTER XXX.

DAY after day passed for Anna at Castle Mount in much the same manner, incessantly occupied with Newton arranging and rearranging, and planning from morning till night.

Mrs. Trego remonstrated in vain. Anna put aside her objections gently, but very firmly.

"There is so much to be done and thought of," she explained, "and I am so anxious that everything should be thoroughly well done."

She spoke almost solemnly, and Mrs. Trego felt there was something about all this planning and arranging she did not like. She had longed to see Anna occupied busily, and had told Max that incessant occupation would be the best remedy possible for her. Yet here was Anna, immersed in business of all kinds, never giving herself an hour's rest or recreation, growing daily thinner, paler, more silent. More "unlike any one else," she told Max, in one of her letters, and she felt almost like one standing by and watching another giving orders for his own funeral.

Newton, too, looked on and wondered. He was not prepared to find this very young lady possessing so clear a head for business matters, and so great a patience in listening to all its dry details.

"Mr. March never gave me so much time and attention, Miss Colet," he said to her one day, when remonstrating with her for the small amount of relaxation she allowed herself. "He generally ended any discussion, and cut short my explanations with, 'You know best, Newton; you have a far better brain for such matters than I, I would much sooner you managed things your own way.'"

The Castle charities, and the comforts of the tenantry had been Anna's first and special care, and now she began to think of their religious necessities.

"Did the rector of Pentallack," she asked one day, when seated with Newton in the quiet little room she had chosen as her study or writing-room, "visit much among the

poorest tenants, or had this been done by the Castle chaplain?"

"Mr. Everhard visited a great deal," replied Newton, "but somehow I don't think he was quite so much liked as our old rector, who is perhaps a little more lenient to the poor people's shortcomings, and never troubles them, unless he is sent for to christen or bury them. That reminds me Miss Colet, of a note I had from Mr. Everhard, a day or two ago, asking me, when I had the opportunity, to present his resignation to you. I did not think it a matter of much importance, and so laid it on one side, till you were more at leisure."

"What a pity!" exclaimed Anna, "I was so hoping that there would be no new appointments of any sort to be made. Do you think

he does this as a matter of etiquette, or could he be induced to reconsider his decision."

Newton shook his head—

"I don't think Mr. Everhard is a man to do a thing hastily," he replied, "he was not fond of reconsidering his decisions as a rule. He and Mr. March didn't get on very well together, they used often to have long disputes on matters of religion, and I suppose that gave him a dislike to the place. I think it was only because he was the son of a very old friend, that Sir Geoffrey took to him as he did;" he paused for a moment and then drew a long breath, "I wonder if Lady Victoria Oldfield has anything to do with this," he added half to himself, and smiling significantly.

"Lady Victoria Oldfield," repeated Anna

in amazement, "what can she have to do with such a thing as this?"

"Only in this way, Miss Colet," replied Newton. "I have been told since Sir Charles Oldfield died the other day, Mr. Everhard has been unremitting and ceaseless in his attentions, and I was thinking it is just possible that he may cherish some hopes of his own in that quarter."

"Sir Charles Oldfield dead!" Anna repeated in utter bewilderment, she could scarcely breathe, and felt oppresssed and faint with the suddenness of the news thus coming upon her.

What did it mean? Which way were things tending? And she felt as though a vision she had seen indistinctly and from afar were drawing very near now, the crowning fulfil-

ment as it were of her hopes, and plans, and thoughts.

She took a few moments to recover herself. Then she said very quietly—

"Tell me all about this Newton. How is it I haven't heard of it before?"

"I only heard of it myself yesterday," replied Newton. "Lady Mary Cathrow's lawyer, Mr. Brevet, came down a few days since to Pentallack, to consult with her ladyship on some family matters. He is an old professional friend of mine, and called on me yesterday before he started for London. Sir Charles has been gradually sinking for a long time, and no one is at all surprised to hear he is dead. It seems the death of his boy (a poor sickly little infant who ought never to have been born) was a great shock

to him, and they had some difficulty in getting him home from Spa. He died, I believe, a few days after their return to Maddingley."

"From Spa," Anna repeated, catching her breath. "Mr. March was at Spa. Did they meet, do you know?"

"Yes, I believe they did, Miss Colet," replied Newton rather doubtful as to how far he was justified in betraying the confidences the family lawyer had reposed in him. "Mr. Brevet was rather in a hurry to save his train, and had not time to go into details, one thing, however, he told me, and that was, that Sir Charles, about a couple of hours before he died, signed a will in favour of his wife, leaving to her absolutely the whole of his Yorkshire estates. Ah! Lady Victoria will have wealth enough now. Let me think,

those lands about Maddingley must have nearly doubled in value since the new railway was laid," and Newton became speedily immersed in an impromptu calculation made with tiny figures in sets of three.

Anna scarcely noticed the latter part of his reply, she only kept repeating to herself again and again—

"She is free. They have met once more, it will all come right now!"

"You look so tired, Miss Colet!" Newton said suddenly looking up from his tiny figures, "will you not leave off work now? I am so grieved to have been compelled to ask for so much of your time and attention. But after to-day I hope there will be nothing more to trouble you."

"No," said Anna dreamily, "nothing more after to-day."

Newton looked up at her anxiously, there was something in her tone of voice which sounded strangely in his ear.

"Tell me Newton," said Anna, "have I done everything that ought to be done? For the good of the place, I mean, and the people."

"Everything possible, Miss Colet. As I have already told you, after to-day, I should simply have to trouble you for your signature, nothing more."

"And are things now exactly as they were in my father's time?" pursued Anna.

"Yes, exactly, in every way!" was Newton's reply, "there is only the vacant

chaplaincy to be filled, but there is no immediate hurry."

"Some one else must do that," said Anna in a low voice, "I do not feel equal to it now."

Mrs. Trego opened the door and looked in—

"Anna, love, will you not put off your riding habit, and have your hair arranged; you will have many callers this afternoon, will it not be better for you to go down to one of the drawing-rooms?"

"I don't think it matters much," replied Anna; with the thoughts she had in her heart at that moment, dressing and "receiving" seemed such very small matters. "I will go down if you like," she added preparing to leave the room.

Mrs. Trego could not quite assure her own

mind as to what was *de rigueur* on these occasions, she still stood somewhat in awe of the numerous ladies—some noble countesses being of the number—who saw fit to pay their visits of ceremony to Miss Colet. She made one more effort to carry her point. "Anna, love," she said, "I should like these ladies to see you at your best, will you not at least let down your hair, it does not suit your face half so well knotted up in that style?"

Anna only shook her head, and went into the drawing-room.

A succession of callers filled up the afternoon. Among others, Lady Mary Cathrow came over from Pentallack, somewhat curious—that is as far as she would permit herself to be—as to the personal appearance and

deportment of this daughter of Sir Geoffrey Colet, who had so suddenly flashed out upon them all; "of course," she had explained to some of her intimate friends, "her mother's birth and breeding will in some way or other show itself in her, *cela va sans dire*. Sir Geoffrey, however, was an old and valued friend of mine, and I would not like in any way to slight his only child."

So clothed in the stiffest of silks, and the iciest of manners, Lady Mary Cathrow drove to Castle Mount that afternoon, intending to stay the conventional ten minutes, and in that ten minutes to make at least as many disagreeable speeches, for she could not in her innermost heart forgive this girl, who had so interrupted the natural order of things, as to step into Llewellyn March's place, and render

him an unsuitable *parti* for her niece, and who now reigned, as it were, on the very throne that niece herself might have occupied.

With perfect good breeding she utterly ignored Mrs. Trego, after the first slight bow on introduction; for, to her thinking, the country doctor's widow was a most unsuitable chaperone for Sir Geoffrey Colet's daughter. Then eyeing Anna fixedly, scanning her from the crown of her head to the sole of her feet, was first startled by her unconventionality of appearance and manner; then impressed by the wild mournful beauty which looked out of her large dark eyes, and, finally, altogether amazed, annoyed and confused, to find herself, Lady Mary Cathrow, sitting there, answering this young girl's questions as she

asked them, submitting, indeed, to be interrogated like any school-girl of sixteen.

Lady Mary commenced with some polite speeches about Miss Colet's health, trusted the Cornish climate would suit her—was so very pleased to make her acquaintance, as she had heard so much of her from Lady Victoria Oldfield.

Anna bowed. "Will Lady Victoria be returning to Pentallack?" she asked.

"I think so," replied Lady Mary, "she has had a great deal of anxiety and trouble, and I think rest and quiet in her old home will do more for her than anything else. Are you fond of riding, Miss Colet?" glancing down at Anna's riding habit, and wondering in her own mind if the young lady had ever

had a horse to ride before she was installed as mistress of Castle Mount.

Anna also quietly looked in her visitor's face, and said to herself, "This woman, with the hard, glittering grey eyes, had something to do with separating those two, but thank God it will be all right now!"

She slightly bent her head in reply to Lady Mary's question, then continuing the subject that was uppermost in her mind, "How will Lady Victoria spend her time here? Is she fond of books, or music, or painting?" she asked.

"She is very fond of all three," replied Lady Mary, "but I fancy she excels most in song, her voice is a very soft rich contralto."

Anna paused a moment in thought. How fond Llewellyn was of music! How lovely Victoria's voice would sound in these lofty rooms! And her fancy sketched some evening assembly, with Llewellyn and Victoria as the central figures, receiving and entertaining their guests amid these paintings and silk hangings, and wax-lights, and flowers. How lovely and queen-like she would look—how thoroughly worthy of the homage and admiration that would be showered upon her.

Anna almost unconsciously turned from this mental picture to a literal and life-like one, showing in a large mirror which hung on the opposite wall. What did she see? Only a slight, drooping girl's figure, in a tight-fitting, dark habit, a thin, white face, with large, wistful eyes, and a small head crowned

with a knot of black hair. Not a very striking picture—scarcely even a pleasant one—and again she drew a fancy portrait of Victoria in some fairylike evening dress, with her bright delicate beauty and stately manners.

"Only she had a false heart!" she whispered, half aloud.

"I beg your pardon," she said, turning to Lady Mary from the mirror before her, "my thoughts carried me away. She looks lovely in evening dress, does she not?"

"Who is 'she,' Miss Colet? If you mean Lady Victoria Oldfield, I must admit she was very much admired at balls and receptions as a rule."

Anna's next question came almost suddenly. "Did she feel her baby's death very much? Did it almost break her heart?"

Lady Mary, woman of the world as she was, scarcely knew how to parry these direct questions. There was some under-current of meaning in all this which she failed to see, she knew, and it behoved her to say something in behalf of her niece, and the marriage she had made.

"Undoubtedly she felt her baby's death very much, Miss Colet, but what was it compared to the death of her husband? That grief must have thrown every other into the shade."

Anna could not let this pass—she could not suffer so flimsy a false pretence as this to be set up under her very eyes. To her mind, the one and only redeeming point in Victoria's character had been the feeling she had shown—was it remorse, or the remains

of love, when they had talked together of Llewellyn March ?

She looked straight at Lady Mary's aquiline nose. "You forget," she said, quite simply, "that I saw Lady Victoria in London after her marriage ! "

Lady Mary rose instantly; she would not condescend to discuss her niece's loves and sorrows with this impetuous, ill-trained girl. Besides, she was not in a position to do so, for she had not the least notion what had passed between Lady Victoria and Miss Colet during their interview in London; she only knew that such an interview had taken place.

So she took leave of Anna with icy politeness, bowing slightly to Mrs. Trego, who now came forward, vaguely conscious that some-

thing had gone wrong, but what she was at a loss to imagine.

"She is a very proud woman, is she not, Anna?" she asked. "Did you offend her in any way?"

Anna made no reply. She was leaning her head wearily on her hand, and looking, through the open French window, beyond the velvet lawns and gay-coloured flower beds, towards a quiet, shaded, silent garden, planted with white-flowered shrubs and quivering aspens, and in the midst of which she knew rose up a plain white marble mausoleum.

She looked so white and worn that Mrs Trego, in anxiety and tenderness, drew the young girl to her side.

"Anna, love," she said, while tears filled her eyes, "had you not better lie down

quietly in your own room for a little while? you look tired to death."

"Yes," said Anna, wearily, gathering together the folds of her long skirt, "I am tired *to death!*"

CHAPTER XXXI.

YES; that was what it had all come to—that was how it was all ending, she was tired *to death*—that was all; nothing more, nothing less. And she threw herself wearily on the silk-canopied bed in her own large, richly-ornamented room, beating her little, tired feet together like some poor hunted, worn-out stag, who, brought back to his own native glades and pastures, stretches itself out on the greensward to die.

Presently some one rapped at her door, and Mrs. Trego called, "Anna, Anna," softly.

"No," said Anna. "Don't come in now.

I must—must rest to-night. Let no one disturb me till the morning." And she threw herself back again on the silken coverlet and closed her eyes, praying for sleep. But it would not come. She was too weary—too tired to rest even.

She threw her arms high above her head, and again they fell listlessly by her side, and then she lay still for a few moments, beating her weary feet together once more.

After a time she grew quieter, ceased to toss and turn from side to side. And, what was this? Was this sleep, this pleasant sort of haze creeping over her, stilling and dulling heart and brain? Or was it some deadly sickness and faintness; or was she, indeed, entering into that narrow border-land between life and death?

She closed her eyes. The room swam round and round her; then faded away into mist and darkness. And all was still and silent night.

Suddenly a light seemed to fall upon her, and everything in the room stood out clear and distinct.

Was it moonlight, was it sunlight, or only the mysterious daylight of that narrow borderland?

Her eyes ached; her brain reeled, dazzled with its gleam and lustre. Then the mist and haze fell once more. The wide, lofty room grew narrow and low, and the walls stooped forward, lower, lower, till the great mirror that hung between the windows at the foot of the bed seemed to touch her very forehead.

And looking into that mirror she saw some wondrous things.

Not the silken, canopied bed, with its gilded ornaments and velvet tassels, and she, poor, tired little Anna, lying in the midst. No visions of Llewellyn March with Victoria in bridal dress by his side, nor yet of the dead father and mother, who were sleeping so quietly in their marble mausoleum.

This is what she saw.

Two great brown crags standing out in a moonlit sea, and a narrow, winding gorge between, which led straight down to white sparkling sands. And as she looked a voice sounded in her ears—

"Death is better than life, for death is peace."

"Who called me?" said Anna, raising

herself on her elbow. "Who called me?" she repeated, looking round her, for she felt as though some familiar—strangely familiar—voice were sounding in her ears.

She tried to collect her senses. How long had she lain there, half in coma, half in sleep?

Hours it must have been, for there was the clear, golden harvest moon shining full in at the diamond-paned windows.

"Who called me?" she repeated once more, expecting almost to hear Mrs. Trego's voice outside the door in reply.

Then she paused abruptly, and a cold shiver ran through her frame, as in a vision, almost, she saw bare workhouse walls rising up before her, and narrow beds ranged in rows, with pinched faces lying on coarse

pillows, and one face more pinched, and worn, and grey, and old than any of the others, turned towards the wall to die.

Then she knew that the voice she had heard was her mother's.

Anna could bear it no longer. She rose slowly from the bed, half-sleeping, half-waking, and opening one of the doors of her room, went out into the corridor.

As her light shadow slanted and quivered on the white stone floor, a clock on one of the staircases struck eleven.

CHAPTER XXXII.

LLEWELLYN MARCH, travelling night and day, arrived in London just as the gigantic city was beginning to awake to life and activity, and, mounting Steinmetz, started at once for Dr. Trego's house.

Dr. Trego, seated at his bachelor's breakfast-table, was opening and glancing over his morning's letters. His coffee was pushed back untasted. A packet of letters had been swept carelessly together, and lay in a disregarded heap at his elbow, while his brow

knotted and his face grew sombre and troubled over one little missive he held in his hand, written in pale ink, and tiny, feminine characters, of the style and angularity which prevailed among ladies of the last generation.

It was from Mrs. Trego, giving full details of the daily routine at Castle Mount, and expressing in a few words a volume of anxiety with regard to Anna.

"I don't know what to say about Anna," she wrote. "Sometimes I fancy her health must, in some measure at least, have improved of late, for she undertakes and goes through a great deal of fatigue in the course of a day. Yet, there is at the same time something in her manner which troubles me very much. I cannot—I dare not—put my

own thoughts about her into words, much less write them down. But I wish with all my heart that some one, having some sort of authority over her, could be with me now to share what I feel to be a most serious responsibility."

Max read through the letter slowly and carefully. Then he sat still and quiet for a full ten minutes, lost in thought.

At length, giving his chair an angry, backward push, he rose, walked to the window, and stood looking straight in front of him.

The tide of life was beginning to hum and buzz up and down the river-side road; the box and laurels had grown brown and crumpled under the August sun, and the little dusty front garden had begun to wear

a weedy, forlorn look, which in the old days it never knew.

"It all comes to this," he thought. "If Llewellyn March does not put in an appearance soon I must run down into Cornwall myself and see what turn matters have taken. My mother may be nervous through being left thus alone with Anna, and may unintentionally have exaggerated the state of affairs. Anyhow, I can't stand this suspense myself much longer. If March had only sent a line to say where he was and what he was doing, I should have known better how to act! But there, that would have been too great a stretch of common sense to expect from him."

Even as he stood there thinking and muttering, the shadow of a horse and its

rider fell across the brown, crumpled evergreens, and Llewellyn March, catching sight of Max at the window, made strenuous efforts to attract his attention.

"Llewellyn March, by all that's wonderful!" exclaimed Max, suddenly awakening from his reverie, and hastening to the garden gate.

There followed a brief, but hearty, handshaking between the old friends, and then Llewellyn's lips formed the one name which had taken possession of his heart, "Anna!"

"Yes, of course," growled Max, "Anna is the one thought now. But why, in Heaven's name, March, didn't you make at once for Castle Mount? 'Thought to find her here!' Oh, yes, you haven't had my last two letters, I suppose. That comes of wandering up and

down Europe, and trusting to Providence, instead of the post-office, for your letters! I won't ask you to come in," he added, as he noticed the look of impatience and disappointment which shadowed his friend's face. "Although you have plenty of time to catch the train into Cornwall, I know you would sooner be starting at once. And here is a letter from my mother, received this morning, you can read as you go along!"

Llewellyn caught the doctor's hand in a firm, strong grip.

"Max, old fellow," he said, "I can't thank you as you ought to be thanked for the sacrifice you are making, but I don't believe there ever lived one more worthy to be called a hero in the truest sense."

"Don't waste time in making speeches,

March!" interrupts Max, as he wrenches his hand away. "And what in the name of fortune induced you to ride through London streets on that wild-looking brute? He'll be shying at the first omnibus or hay-cart he comes across; you would get along much better in a hansom. Let me have him put up for you to-day somewhere; you can easily send for him when you want him."

Llewellyn shook his head.

"No, no, Max, Steinmetz and I don't part company so easily as that; he may do me good service yet. Did they call him a wild-looking brute, we know each other, my beauty, don't we?" This *sotto voce* to Steinmetz.

"You have grown positively into the middle-aged man, March," Max went on.

"I think I should have passed you in the street, unless my attention had been specially directed to you. There, I won't keep you another moment," he added, as Steinmetz, mirroring well his master's impatience, pawed the ground with his lithe, strong limbs, and tossed back his long, silken mane. "You'll scarcely make Castle Mount to-night, unless you post it from St. Caradoc."

Llewellyn stoops from the saddle once more to grasp his friend's hand in farewell. Steinmetz shakes his small ears, and prepares to start in grand, self-contained style, as though he would say, "there's no special hurry just at present, but when they want speed, I will show them what I can do."

And Max, standing at the garden gate shading his eyes with his hand in the dazzling

morning sunshine, watches Llewellyn out of sight.

"God bless them both," he said, in unheard response to his friend's hand-waved adieu. "God bless them both, and send them all the happiness they deserve."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

AT length seated in the train that was to bear him over the latter part of his journey, Llewellyn March found time to gather together his thoughts, and endeavour, if possible, to look a little in front of him.

Yet what had he to look at after all?

A whole mountain of suppositions, possibilities and conjectures of the dimmest and most uncertain kind, but of plain, sober matter-of-fact not one single grain nor iota.

"If it were not that Max himself has this terror before him, I could easily imagine that

Mrs. Trego, misled by her own fears or fancies, had unintentionally exaggerated the state of things at Castle Mount. One look, however, at Max's face is enough to prove there is something very real and terrible behind all this." So ran Llewellyn's thoughts.

Why did he think thus to himself in enigmatical phrases, "this terror," "the state of things at Castle Mount." Was it that he, like Mrs. Trego, dared not put his thoughts into words?

Why was it, as he talked with Max at his garden gate, that he did not ask one simple question, "what is it you dread, Max; why have you sent for me thus?" Could it be that deep down in his heart, the answer lay already written, in one dark, hopeless, mournful word—a word he dared not even whisper

to himself in lowest tones, and whose very possibility of truth made him cower and tremble as though some spectre or phantom had suddenly broken forth from its coffin, and confronted him, clothed in all the hideousness and ghastliness of the grave.

"Would God that it were night." Never did poor death-stricken sufferer, who knows that when night falls the great absolute King will hand him his release from agony and racking pain, pray this prayer more fervently than Llewellyn March, as the train sped onward, leaving the vast city, with its throbbing, busy, noisy life, far behind. Onward through fair pasture land, and miles of waving corn-fields, over hills and under hills, like some wonderful meteor flashing in and out of earth's hollow caverns, swift and subtle

almost as the very wind, yet slow and leaden-footed, indeed, compared with the winged speed his terrors and anxieties would have craved.

"All unconsciously," he thought, "all unwillingly, I have lost some of the most precious hours God ever gave to man, but not another instant will I let slip away now. Castle Mount this night, or not at all!"

So the dreary hours crept slowly away, each one with halting, limping gait and mocking face, as though it would say, "You may conquer distance, oh, man, and bring north and south together, but us you cannot speed!"

It did not once occur to him the bitter satire he was pointing at himself in speeding thus rapidly along to the fate a woman had

to offer him, when only a short twelve months before he had fled just as swiftly from the fate another woman had dealt out to him.

No, his mind was too full of one all-absorbing hope, and one all-absorbing dread, to admit of aught beside—the hope "I shall see her once more, my heart's darling, and can kneel at her very feet, begging forgiveness for my folly and blindness;" the dread, for ever sounding in his ears like some minor chant at a funeral service, "what if I come too late, what if I come too late!"

Once, indeed, it flashed through his brain how bravely he had talked about taking his life into his own hands again, and how completely, from first to last, his own plans had been reversed, over-turned, and altogether scattered to the four winds of Heaven.

"A mere shuttlecock, driven hither and thither at the will of others," he soliloquised, something of the old bitter feeling of self-contempt rising up in his heart.

"Drifting along the tide of life I went, without map to guide, or purpose to follow, and when at length the purpose is formed, with honest will and determination to carry it out, I discover that the tide is turned, and I am whirled, perforce, in an opposite direction. Perhaps, after all," he added, thoughtfully and reverently, "a man has no power to mould or guide his life until he has yielded it into the hands of the Highest to be moulded and guided according to His perfect will, and by His perfect laws."

Was this to be the key after all to his

sorrows and difficulties, his temptations and agonies, that God's purpose had ruled his life when most it seemed purposeless and aimless, that, in fact, it had been taken out of his own hands to be yielded back to him once more in its fullness and sweetness.

"God knows!" he exclaimed, the agony of doubt, suspense and dread sweeping over him, and shutting out every other thought and feeling. What if after all for him there were to be no key, no solution to the griefs and heart-aches which had so beset him; what if after all he were speeding down to a worse and more terrible mystery and anguish than any that had yet come upon him. "God knows, and I know nothing; I cannot see one step before me. May not the key, the

solution to my life, aye, to Anna's life also, well be left in His keeping, Who holds the lives themselves in the hollow of His hand, and in Whose eternal ears can never sound that requiem of time, 'too late?'"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"CASTLE Mount this night," said Llewellyn March, as he entered the little town of St. Caradoc in the vanishing light, "Castle Mount this night or not at all!"

How strange and yet how familiar the little Cornish town seemed to him, with its narrow, irregular streets, and its oddly-built granite houses. An old-world town it is, unique in itself and unique in its inhabitants, for they, too, have a resuscitated old-world look, as though they had gone to sleep for a hundred

years or so in their quaint little homes, and had wakened up in their ancient costumes and gone pattering about their everyday avocations.

Two or three of the townspeople recognised him as he rode along, and wished him respectful "good evens," wondering, in a vague sleepy way, to what sudden turn of fortune they owed this unexpected reappearance among them of the at-one-time heir of Castle Mount, for the news of the changes which had taken place at the old Castle had spread far and near throughout the county, causing an immense amount of speculation and an unwonted stir of animation, even among the chrysalides of the community.

One by one the stars were beginning to shine out in the night-blue of the sky, and

the harvest moon had risen out of the sea a very globe of fire as Llewellyn went along the silent and well-nigh deserted streets. Several of the blinds and curtains were pushed on one side to get a glimpse of one who had once been so popular, and courted by high and low. Some of the men came down to their cottage doors for a nod and a smile, and the landlord of the only inn the place could boast came forth to meet him, rightly judging he would be the first person Mr. Llewellyn would seek.

"Do you want rooms for the night, sir, and your horse seen to," he enquired respectfully. "Splendid animal that, sir," he added, as he glanced admiringly at Steinmetz's straight, strong limbs and glossy coat, with its firm, fine tracery of vein and muscle, "he ought

to be able to do something with his long legs, sir."

"Yes," said Llewellyn, "I want him to do something to-night. Just take him in and see to him, Thom; wait, I'll go with you, he's rather dainty in his notions of diet, and has had a fair amount of travelling the last three or four days. I don't doubt, however, but what he'll make Castle Mount to-night."

"Castle Mount to-night, sir?" repeated Thom, relapsing in his amazement into the broadest of Cornish dialects, "you'll not be gwine to try such a thing, Mr. Llewellyn, and the beast not knowing the road, and the moon lighting up every fence and finger-post into pixies and ghosties! If I had my Blue Dragon at home, sir, you should have him and welcome, but I sent him over and the

two mares to Lady Blanchard's this morning —they are having a pic-nic at the Grange— and Jan took them down."

"Thanks, Thom," interrupted Llewellyn, "I would sooner trust my Steinmetz than your Blue Dragon. I don't know that he's particularly good at hack-work, but we'll try and see what he can get through to-night."

As he spoke, the clear harvest moon shining through the white scudding clouds poured a flood of light on the quaint, gabled-roof of the inn, with its background of rock and cliff, and the sound of the splash and dash of the sea came up from the bay beneath.

"What about the tide to-night, Thom?" asked Llewellyn.

Thom consulted his almanac.

"I used to know without looking, Mr.

Llewellyn, but since my last attack I haven't been down to the coast much. Dear me, my eyes are not what they were! Can you see, sir?" and he handed the somewhat soiled and worn manual to Llewellyn.

"Full moon at 12 p.m., high tide at 12.15. Thanks, Thom, I'll start at once, I think," and he vaulted into the saddle as he spoke, Thom meanwhile adjusting the girths.

"Now, my beauty, my Steinmetz, steady at first, and no shying at finger-posts and blackthorns to-night, if you please."

He trotted his bay gently out of the stable-yard, stooping under its quaint, low archway, and, with a brief good-night to the old man, and one upward, thankful glance at the deep sapphire sky, with its wondrous lamp of silver, set off on his thirty-five miles' ride.

His horse's feet echoed and clattered bravely down the now silent village street and thence on to the soft peat of the moorland beyond, where, on either side of him, spread the glorious landscape in all its calm, peaceful moonlit grandeur. And he, with his nerves strung to their highest pitch, his brain in a feverish whirl, and his heart torn and racked with a terrible doubt and a dread to which he dared not give a name!

He had known what it was to scorch and burn with fever in the brain, he had lain, as he had thought, in mortal agony on the field of battle, and the recollection of the days and nights of torture and pain through which he had passed in the desolate farm-house at Gravelotte he knew he should carry with him to the grave, yet, what was it all compared

with the anguish of suspense which burned like living fire in his heart at this moment, as he asked himself, "To what am I riding now? What is it lies waiting for me at the other end of this thirty miles?"

On and on he went, Steinmetz trotting superbly, as only a well-trained, highly-bred horse can trot; on and on across the country he knew so well, and yet which had grown to wear so strange a face to him; down steep lanes and through wooded knolls, with the bright, dancing moonlight flickering in and out of the hedges, with their tangled masses of perfume and colour, and across the sedgy pools and weed-grown ditches; on and on, his pulses beating faster, the terror, the doubt and the dread deepening and

growing upon him, and his whole heart going forth in one strong, passionate prayer, "Oh, God! that I may not be too late!"

On and on he went, now through a dark fir grove, with straight creaking trees right and left, and the air heavy with all sorts of night perfumes. On and on, the grove breaking abruptly now and then, and letting in glimpses of frowning cliffs, and a desolate brown country lying between. On and on, the big white stones here and there in the rocky highway glancing up at him, and the sombre firs striking gaunt heavy shadows across his pathway, and across Steinmetz's glossy coat. On and on, the landscape growing wilder and more barren as he neared the sea, and the moonlight whiter and whiter, as the moon

mounted higher in the heavens, and the prayer rising up louder and louder from the depths of his heart—

"Oh, God that I may not be too late!"

And at the end of the fir grove, the road parted, and Llewellyn drawing rein, paused for an instant in deepest thought.

Which way should he take? That steep rocky lane with its high uneven hedges, and mossy ditches on either side, wound upward, ever higher and higher, till it opened into the wide breezy downs, which stretched right away to the park gates of Castle Mount. The gates would be closed he knew, and the lodge-keeper no doubt in his first deepest sleep, and perhaps difficult to arouse. However, that need not matter, his thoughts flew back to his old hunting days, and he recol-

lected with a sudden thrill that ancient gap in the park thicket, and in what splendid style his mare used to take it ! He would save possibly ten minutes. by this road, for the other leading down to the sands was somewhat more curved and circuitous. Then it flashed across his mind what if the thicket be mended, and the gap no longer there ! He would lose far more than the ten minutes, endeavouring to rouse the deaf old lodge-keeper, or possibly in riding round the outside of the park, trying to discover his old "short cut." No, it was not to be thought of, it would be running too great a risk with time so precious. The longer road would no doubt prove the shorter one in the end. He paused again, trying to bring back the recollection of those old days which seemed so

far away now. He had often timed himself home by the other route along the coast—was it not a forty-five minutes ride from these cross roads to the sea, and then a good half-hour's canter along the sands to the narrow gorge which led up between the rocks into the park? What time was it now? He felt mechanically for his watch—ah, that had perished long since amid the accidents of war—

"Let me think," he said aloud, "at this pace I must have been about an hour coming from St. Caradoc, that will leave me just time to make the Castle before the tide is in."

Would it leave him time?

For another instant he sat still and motionless in the saddle, then turned Steinmetz's head towards the steep downward pathway,

whence came a rush of fresh salt breeze blowing straight off the sea.

As he did so, Pentallack church bells chimed eleven.

CHAPTER XXXV.

ANNA wandered on through the dusky gloom of the corridor.

At the farther end, the moonlight streamed in through a high square window, and fell slantwise on a dark oak-panelled door, half-draped with some soft thick curtain.

With the vision of brown crags and white moon-lit sea still floating before her eyes, Anna turned the handle and entered the room.

Through the long French windows, the moonlight poured in here also.

What did it show her?

A somewhat small room, curiously panelled and painted with Eastern landscapes—long reeds growing out of shallow water, with butterflies poised above here and there; boughs heavy with peach-blossoms branching from the sea-green panel, and bright-plumaged birds flying downwards to floating arums and lilies. An ebon book-case in a recess, reached from floor to ceiling; a silver lamp swung low in the middle of the room, and an Œnone looked down from a moonlit pedestal with desolateness and anguish in every line and feature. Dark chairs were scattered here and there about the room, and a secretaire richly carved, and inlaid and fitted with numerous drawers, stood in a corner, under a life-size painting of St. Catharine.

The moonlight lent a strange pallid brilliance to the features of the saint, and played in azure and opal tints on the massive silver fittings of the writing-table, throwing out in bold relief the monogram on inkstand and pen-tray, L. M.

Anna started with a sudden sharp pain at her heart. Unintentionally she had wandered into Llewellyn's study.

She paused for a moment, looking down at the entwined initials, thence her eyes wandered to the pale face of the saint above. It had some sort of a dim far-away likeness to the Lady Victoria, but a Victoria sanctified, ennobled, idealised, Victoria as she had appeared no doubt in the eyes of her lover, in the early days of their betrothal.

Anna caught the faint resemblance to the

living girl. "Yes," she said, with her face upturned to the canvas, "he will be all your own soon, only be true to him, now you have learnt how hard it is to be false."

She took a pen in her hand, held it in doubt for a moment then laid it firmly on one side—

"No, better not," she said aloud, "it might give him pain."

She unfastened a tiny gold chain she wore round her neck with a locket attached (a present from Llewellyn in the old childish days) and laid it on the writing-table.

"I should like him to find it here," she murmured, "when he comes home."

Then opening one of the long windows, which led down by a flight of stone steps on to the lawn, she looked out into the silence of the night.

How still, how white it all was! Not even a night-bird spoke, nor a leaf stirred in the quiet air. And yet this—what was this murmur of voices going on in her brain? Could it be the wash of the sea, or the sighing of a distant south wind? Or was this room of his alive with sound, with a rushing and muttering, as of many voices, and one voice rising high above the rest—

"Death is better than life, for death is peace."

In the room where Llewellyn had been tempted and had conquered, Anna was tempted and fell.

Had that woman's curse, which she had raved forth in her madness and misery, clung to the very walls of the house, and did one stone cry it out to another? Or had it des-

cended to her only child, and rested on her now as the sole heritage her mother had right to bequeath to her?

"I am so tired, so tired," she thought, "I will lie down somewhere and go to sleep."

"Peace, peace," sounded in her ears. "Yes," she said, answering the voices, as though spoken by actual human lips, "it will soon be peace now, and he will come back to his home, and all that is crooked will be made straight." She leaned her head wearily on her hand, and looked upward with large sorrowful eyes to the vast clear heavens. Then they drooped once more, and there straight in front of her beyond the shining lawns, and flower beds, she beheld the reality of her mirror-dream, "two huge brown crags standing out against a moonlit sea, and a

narrow gorge between, leading straight down to the white glittering sands."

Then the voices rang out loud and clear in the silent room, "Better than life, better than life, for death is peace."

Anna went softly out into the white moonlight.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"AGAINST time and tide now, my beauty," said Llewellyn, as he took the last curve of the rocky road which brought him face to face with the vast ocean sleeping in its flood of silver light, and murmuring and chanting the gentlest and softest of music. "Against time and tide now, my beauty; get your speed up, my Steinmetz, and show your blood to-night." And Steinmetz, in response to his master's adjuration, gave one gallant bound on to the sparkling

sands, and quickened his stride into something of the racer's step.

How long had he before him? Time must be measured by minutes now he knew, for the harvest moon shone forth overhead, a perfect globe of light in all its fullness and glory.

Oh, the beauty, the serenity, that reigned everywhere, the wondrous lights and shades of that moonlit rock and sea picture, the sweet, calm peace that brooded over all!

And as Llewellyn looked and wondered, something of the spirit of the landscape entered into his own, the fiery burning in his brain ceased, his pulses beat less wildly, and the pain at his heart toned down into that perfect acquiescence in whatever God's hand held in store for him, which comes sometimes

after long struggling and protracted agony in obedience to some direct Divine message.

How the message came to him he did not know.

Whether it was borne to him on the soft sea breeze that fanned his cheek, or was whispered in the monotone of the waves, or came down upon him straight from Heaven in the falling moonlight, he did not know. All he knew was that the message had gone straight home to his innermost soul, and he held it there.

It was uttered in no vague, mystic undertone, but clear, distinct and loud, in language a child might understand.

And in the fullness of his peace and perfect confidence he would have uttered it aloud in words as plain as those in which he had re-

ceived it, had there been living soul at hand to hearken.

Could he, with one effort of his voice, have roused the sleeping world, he would have done so, and have proclaimed aloud his message to the whole universe.

Trumpet-like his voice should have sounded forth from pole to pole. "O, earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord! Shall the brown rocks take centuries to build, and the sea be spread for thousands of generations, and to man the very son of God be dealt out a scanty three score years and ten?

"Shall we call that begun and ended, which comes we know not whence, and goes we know not whither?

"Shall we call that a volume complete, finished, which is but a chapter out of one,

or that a life which is but as a full drawn breath?

"Rather let us leave the chapter half written to be finished by Him who wrote the pages that went before, and who will pen those that are to follow. Let us trust the breath, half drawn, to Him from whom it came, to whom it goes. Let no man struggle, nor beg, nor crave for a fate, nor against a fate at His hands before whom the whole universe lies open from first to last to be completed and perfected by His laws and according to His will, and each tiny human life fitted in its own place to be perfected in, and as part of, the wondrous whole!"

So he rode on, the moon rising high and higher in the clear heavens, the peace growing deep and deeper in his soul; on and on, the

music of the sea drawing nearer with the advancing tide, and Steinmetz's brave, swift feet scattering the glittering sand like diamond sparkles right and left.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

NOT a sound, not a falling leaf, nor sighing breeze, as Anna, with the white light of the moon on her face, slowly made her way towards the sea shore.

The silence of death reigned everywhere.

She gathered up her long trailing habit, and passed noiselessly over the soft emerald lawns, along the narrow winding paths, thence in and out among the weird, gaunt shadows of the grand old trees in the park.

And now the rush and dash of the waves sounded loudly in her ears.

The tide was coming in rapidly.

The loud voices that rang out so sharply as she wandered about the Castle have ceased now. Only the waves have taken up the self-same words, and chant them in soft lullaby notes. "Is peace, is peace," they sing, as they flow and ebb away in perfect time and measure at the base of the brown crags.

"I am so tired, so tired," whispered Anna, wearily, as she sank down in the moonlight by a huge granite boulder, and leaned her head against its rough grey sides.

Truly, she was "tired to death."

"On, Steinmetz, on for very life now," shouts Llewellyn, as the tide rises higher and higher above his horse's hoofs, and the waves come whirling and rushing on towards the

granite rocks. "Strain every nerve, my Steinmetz; show what you can do to-night, or never at all."

He urges the brave animal forward; on and on over the white sands they fly with the speed of the winds. The pale moon above shows the waters swelling and rising to Steinmetz's very flanks, and only the wall of granite, hard and glittering, on the other side! On and on, the glittering sands growing narrow and narrower, the rush and roar of the waves sounding louder and louder, until at length they are dashing against the grand old rocks themselves.

A great wave settled down on the fair young face, lifted once more, and sobbed itself out at her very feet.

"Is peace, is peace," it murmured, as it

ebbed away. "Death, death," sang the oncoming surge, and Anna's eyes closed wearily.

But the straining of breath and the splashing of horse's hoofs mingle with the wash and song of the waves, and as the waters lift from the sleeping girl's face, Llewellyn sees it white and upturned in the cold moonlight.

"Anna, Anna!" A great bitter cry goes up from his heart as the waves come rushing onwards.

Only time to stoop from his saddle and seize her long black hair as the waters sweep over them.

Steinmetz staggers under the weight of the new burthen, which Llewellyn lifts on to his brave shoulders.

"One more struggle. Steady now, my beauty," he shouts loud above the rush of the tide.

The brave animal falters one moment. The next, guided by his master's firm, strong hand, with one mighty effort, struggles up the narrow gorge, and lands them safely on high ground.

* * * * *

Once more Llewellyn March stands upon Arthur's Mound, and by his side is a slight, drooping girl, with white face and large dark eyes.

The song of the reaper is going up over all the land, and the golden glories of Autumn are being gathered in.

Hand-in-hand they stand, with their faces

turned seawards, and the sweet low music of the waves sounding in their ears.

The girl is speaking in soft tremulous tones.

"May God help all poor tempted, suffering souls," she is saying.

"Aye," replies Llewellyn, as he holds the little hand more tightly in his own, "and may He lead them, as He has led us, through sorrow and anguish into perfect peace."

THE END.

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